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Lectures on the Irish
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LECTURES

ON THE

IRISH LANGUAGE MOVEMENT

DELIVERED UNDER THE AUSPICES OF VARIOUS BRANCHES OF THE

GAELIC LEAGUE

WITH AN INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER,

BY THE

REV. P. S. DINNEEN, M.A.

Dublin:

PUBLISHED FOR THE KEATING BRANCH OF
THE GAELIC LEAGUE BY

M. H. GILL & SON, LTD., 50 UPPER O'CONNELL
STREET.

1904.

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PREFACE.

THE Committee of the Keating Branch of the Gaelic League are glad to announce that they have prevailed upon Father Dinneen, President of the Branch, to allow his Lectures on the Irish Language to be published in book-form with an Introductory Chapter. Although accurate condensed reports of the Lectures here given appeared in the *Freeman's Journal*, and were copied into some of the provincial and foreign press, nevertheless their publication at this date will give fresh emphasis to the arguments for preserving Irish as a vernacular speech which they contain. The circumstance that they were delivered before popular audiences, and prepared while work of an entirely different character was pressing heavily on the author, made him reluctant to publish them in a collected form. With the exception of a short address delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Keating Branch in April, 1903, and an address before the O'Growney Branch in February of the present year, only set lectures are included in this collection.

I.—INTRODUCTORY.

THE Irish Language Revival movement is attracting a good deal of attention of late. The main plank in the platform of the movement is the Irish language in some form or other, but with the cultivation of the language there is associated an effort to revive Irish games and pastimes, Irish manners and customs, as well as Irish industries. The language is the root on which all the other elements are grafted, and it is the language in its living state, and not the language as found in books and manuscripts, that is the true basis of this general national revival. If the Irish Language were to become extinct as a living speech, as, say, Cornish is extinct, even though it should be studied in every school in Ireland, it could not be taken as the basis of a national regeneration. It is the living word, and the living word alone, that possesses the spell that is powerful enough to call back the nation as a whole from the degrading life of foreign imitation, and give it strength and nerve to develop a native civilization. For this object, it is not necessary that the language should be vernacular throughout the entire country. It is sufficient that it exist in a flourishing condition as a real vernacular, that it have every facility for growth and extension, and that it be studied everywhere, and be held in high esteem in the schools and councils of the land. It is impossible, however, for the language to exist and thrive at the present time without growth and extension. It must be made the vehicle of education, it must be used for all the purposes of civilized life, it must be cultivated to the point of spontaneous literary expression, it must produce a literature that will be able to hold its own against contemporary English literature. To produce such a literature, an audience of Irish readers must be created sufficient to ensure a reasonable circulation for Irish books and newspapers and magazines, and the Irish-reading public must be of sufficiently wide range to insure a healthy diversity to the literary output.

In an age like the present, it is no easy thing to maintain a cultivated living speech in such a state of vitality that it can hold its own against the living, highly cultivated languages of the great modern nations. Irish has, indeed, several advantages over English. It has lain long dormant, and has

never been spoiled by excessive printing. Its lack of scientific terminology, though a serious shortcoming, from the utilitarian point of view, renders it more suitable as a vehicle of pure literature. Its study is interesting to the antiquarian and comparative philologist, and it has preserved its identity more completely than perhaps any other European language. It is even at the present day a strongly inflected language and its grammatical structure is so precise and so unlike that of most other modern languages, that its study may become an important element in a liberal education. It is so closely bound up with our historical documents, and with the very topography of the country that a knowledge of it is indispensable for even an elementary study of our history. It is, no doubt, deficient in literature of general interest, and this deficiency must continue for a long time.

It should be borne in mind that Irish can fulfil important functions as a national language without becoming vernacular over the entire island, or even over half the island, provided it be cultivated with care in those districts in which it is living, and be studied as well as is possible in the other parts of the country, and there can be no question that its existence as a flourishing vernacular in the country must produce a profound effect on the character of the entire people, and be no inconsiderable force in shaping the destinies of the nation. It will serve to give future generations a love for their country, considered as a distinct historic nation, and will stimulate them to work with enthusiasm for her welfare and her glory. It will serve to distinguish the Irish people abroad from those of other nationalities, and thus strengthen the hands of the people at home. It will, moreover, insure that the national character will develop along native lines.

There can be no doubt that the widespread diffusion of literature in English, created in England, dealing mainly with English or Imperial subjects, saturated with English thought and propagating English ideas is calculated to denationalize the people of this island, and make them ape English manners and fashions. This tendency would undoubtedly be checked to an important extent by the study of Irish and by the spread of an up-to-date Irish Literature such as would claim the attention of all educated men. In order to secure this, our Irish-speaking population must be of considerable extent, must be educated through the medium of their language, and their education must be of a liberal kind; moreover, they must be in touch with the life-throb of modern civilization. It should be borne in mind that the English language, so far from possessing a monopoly of up-to-date science and literature, is far behind French and German in

recent scientific works and in recent works of general literature.

English literature has fallen upon evil days. The wide diffusion of printed matter has brought about an unwholesome revolution in the world of letters. The number of those who can read has grown, but the matter most generally read is light and trivial or ephemeral. The literature of the age reflects clearly the spirit of the age, and in towns and cities and even country districts in Ireland are to be found at a cheap rate books and pamphlets, magazines and newspapers full of the spirit of modern English urban life.

It is not too much to say that the principles that are acted on in social and public life in Great Britain at the present day, as chronicled in the newspaper press and as reflected in current literature, have a strong tendency to bring about the dissolution of society, and to involve the nation in social, political, and moral chaos. Take an important example. The light in which the marriage contract is regarded by all classes of society as witnessed in the proceedings of the Divorce Court, and in the columns of general news, is incompatible with the permanency of marriage as an institution amongst us. Now, it may be said that society among Christian nations is founded on the unity and indissolubility of the marriage tie. Principles, therefore, that assail its unity or indissolubility are striking at the root of human society as organized amongst us. These principles do not work alone, they are accompanied by principles that strike at civil authority, the rights of property, and other institutions that are absolutely essential to our existence as a social organisation. But once marriage is overthrown in society organized on Christian principles, a chaos deeper than ever plummet sounded in social and national life is certain to ensue. The destruction of the institution of marriage is certain to bring with it the fall of the pillars that sustain the entire social fabric, and generations of blood and carnage and great social cataclysms must ensue before the ruin is repaired. Although Ireland is under the same government as Great Britain, and though both countries have much in common in civil institutions and methods of social life, still there is a vast gulf between them in trend of thought, in the way in which they regard the fundamental principles on which social order and human society are based, and, in particular, in their attitude towards the institution of marriage. This country is, to a large extent, still untainted by the teaching of the positivist, the materialist, the hedonist which pervades English literature whether serious or trivial. Now, it is obvious that if the literature that is most widely read and studied and imitated in Ireland come to us across the Channel, it will be

difficult to prevent that literature from planting the seeds of social disorder and moral degeneracy amongst even our still untainted population. That English literature will of a necessity be largely studied amongst us is obvious, but that study will be robbed of much of its evil if we have side by side with it a native literature, redolent of native tradition, and inspired by the spirit that moulded our history. To preserve our historic identity, the spirit that animated our ancestors must be handed down to future generations, and by no channel can it be so handed down so well as by trickling through the language that has for countless ages been vernacular in the country, and in which the soul of our ancestors lives and breathes. It is of special importance to our national well-being that those parts of the country that are still unspoiled by a degenerate civilization, should grow up to the full manhood of modern civilized life nurtured by the food of their own literature, their history and traditions.

Industrialism, military activity, seafaring, literary energy, are but passing phases of a nation's life. It is the spirit that animates a nation that constitutes its most permanent element, and to which the greatest importance should be attached. Whether a people live in walled towns or herd together in hives of industry, or lead a purely pastoral life, is of far less importance in their history than whether they are lovers of truth and justice, or hospitable to strangers, or merciful to the oppressed. No one can doubt the importance of preserving and perpetuating virtues such as truth, justice, fidelity, hope and pity, or such qualities as heroism, loyalty, confidence, and generosity; but these virtues and qualities have a far better chance of being preserved and perpetuated when they are fostered as national virtues and qualities, when they form part of the nation's life, when they grow with its growth and strengthen with its strength.

The influence of a people on the world at large is in no way commensurate with their wealth or even with their intellectual power. National character counts for far more than national affluence or national genius. National character requires time to work its way, its influence is seen to best advantage when centuries of obloquy and oppression have been borne, and we look back on generations of adversity, of blood and tears. Military triumphs, vast possessions, abounding prosperity, academic renown, the glory of art and science, all these do not reveal the true heart of a nation, they minister, indeed, to its pride and vanity, but they are no unerring tests of its tenacity of purpose, or of its fidelity to truth and justice. It is being slowly recognised that military greatness is nothing more than a passing phase of a nation's life, that industrialism is something still more evanescent, and that

when the fever in a nation's blood that has excited it to military glory begins to burn low, and when the moral degradation and social cataclysms that follow in the wake of industrialism have brought the nation back to a simpler mode of life, and to more elementary principles of economics, that after all this a people find themselves with the character which has grown up amid the vicissitudes of their national life as their chief weapon, offensive and defensive, for taking their part in the world-strife of nations. Great revolutions are but as instances of national insolvency. After the blood has been wiped away, and the smoke of internecine contest has cleared off, after the greedy creditors that are ever ready to pounce on a prostrate people have received their small dividend, a nation often resumes the course of its world-life with the character of its people as its chief asset. The formation of national character, then, its development and its perpetuation is one of the most important of those problems on whose solution depends a nation's well-being, it is a problem that no enlightened statesman can afford to neglect.

A nation's character is slow of formation, it is nurtured by institutions whose foundations were laid in the distant past, and acquires steadiness and permanence in proportion as these institutions are steady and permanent; it survives battles, sieges, fortunes, social and political revolutions, the growth and decay of empires; it enters with a nation into new political combinations, and emerges with it to political independence; its identity can be traced through the nomadic, the pastoral, the military, the industrial periods of a nation's life; it is the key that unlocks the secret of a nation's history; it is the power that moves a people to mighty deeds; it is the subtle essence of their national life; it is the indelible stamp that distinguishes them from other members of the great family of peoples. National character is influenced and moulded by the events and circumstances that mould a nation's history, and is wounded deeply whenever there is a violent or sudden change in the circumstances under which it grew and strengthened. Each succeeding age, introducing, as it does, a new set of circumstances, tends to stamp its own image on the national character, tends to inoculate it with its own peculiar virtues and vices. It is only permanent national institutions that will give it steadiness amid the fluctuations of taste, of manners, of habits, and that will check the undue influence of foreign teaching and foreign example. Among these institutions it is obvious that religion holds a foremost place, and it is equally obvious that the national language is of far-reaching importance. The language in which a nation has lisped in the infancy of its civilized life, that has given expression to its most glowing

enthusiasm, to its wisest reflections, to its sweetest melody, that has grown and developed step by step as the nation grew and developed, whose very words and phrases breathe the breath of history and legend, such a language is a powerful factor in moulding the national character, and being of its nature a permanent factor, cannot be destroyed without irreparable loss to that character. The national language is the poor man's literature and folk-lore, it is his history and tradition, it reflects what he knows of his own country and of the outer world, it is his fund of music and song, it is the repertory of his prayers, it is the source of his wise maxims, in it he gives vent to his feelings, to his hopes and fears, in it he hears words of consolation and encouragement from his friends, and in it the minister of his religion soothes his soul in its passage to eternity. He teaches that language to his children, not by any system of pedagogy, but in the school of nature and parental affection, with the infant pupil reclining on his breast and the tender hand stroking his rugged cheek. But in teaching that language he makes his infant child a denizen of an empire that embraces the past and the present, he makes him heir to the thought, the wisdom, the imagination, the melody of his ancestors, he supplies him with a medium in which he can continue the interrupted conversation of those that went before him, add to their store of wisdom and revel in their sallies of wit and humour; and all this in as kindly and natural a manner as if long generations of his forefathers still inhabited the earth, and sang their songs, and repeated their words of wisdom in his ear. That language is suited to every age from the lisping of childhood to the slow and solemn utterances of grave seniors. It can give expression to the warmest desires, to the most ardent piety, to the sincerest patriotism. It is the nurse of piety, of love of home and country, of every social and domestic virtue.

So far, I have been speaking of what the national vernacular language is to the illiterate and to the children of the illiterate; the study of native literature in such a language is such a sweet and pleasant process that it is a natural continuation of the fantastic tales and quaint rhymes of the nursery. All this simplicity and naturalness is changed when the child struggles with a new language but imperfectly known to the parents, a language in which the parents have no store of song, no repertory of story, no fund of wise sayings; a language which they cannot speak with ease or accuracy or fluency, which is alien to their habits of thought, in which their very names and surnames appear awkward and outlandish. The child falters between the language of his parent and his home, and the language of the school and of his books

which he but ill understands and which contains little that links him to his own ancestral past; his mind gets stunted, and his spirit gets estranged from the spirit that animated his ancestors. He loses his natural vivacity and flow of spirits, he becomes lumbering and dull.

Students of Irish history and of the Irish character have observed a marked decadence in the vivacity, the sprightliness, the acuteness of the Irish peasant in the latter half of the nineteenth century in those places in which the Irish language has been decaying and giving place to English. No doubt other causes besides the loss of the language have contributed to this, but the loss of the vernacular may be safely regarded as one of the principal causes. In the eighteenth century, everybody knew plenty of good poetry by rote, and recited it frequently. A large percentage of the population composed tolerably good verse, often extemporaneously, and appreciated good verse. Men with a turn for versification lashed one another with satire, not out of malice, but through love of the art; and devotees broke out into poetical prayer and extemporised sacred canticles. The burthen of this popular poetry appealed even to the uneducated. Now all this is changed; there is, indeed, plenty of good poetry in the English language, but it is not such as to appeal directly to a people to whom the language is foreign, and to whose habits of thought it is unsuited. A large proportion of the people in the Irish districts speak English with tolerable ease, yet it has not taken such root in their minds, it is not so graceful, so ready, so natural on their lips as to bubble up spontaneously into literary expression. There is no such thing as a popular literature in English for such as these, and the loss of a popular literature is irreparable. Nor will the mingling of traditional lore with ordinary conversation, or the hitching of legendary heroes in sprightly verse, or the singing in faultless metre of songs that contain the quintessence of a nation's history be, for a long time to come, characteristic of the populace at large as in the 18th and previous centuries.

The age of natural, spontaneous, popular music and poetry, of hoary traditions, of quaint fairy beliefs, of child-like imaginings, is gone, and with it the golden legends that peopled haunted streams and green glens in the heart of lone mountains, that gave a tongue to every jutting crag, and a wailing voice to every waving wood. The Irish language, the natural medium of legendary lore, of popular belief, of immemorial tradition, was itself a literature and a history to the people. The possessors of a rich, vigorous, and delicately attuned language, even without book-lore, can lay claim to education of a certain kind. Oratory and poetry may flourish without the

aid of letters. But though the era of folk-lore and folk-song, of historical tradition and legendary history, of imagined inhabitants of the hills and glens, and of a language that embraced all these, though that era be vanished, still much can be gained by preserving Irish where it is still spoken, and extending it to other districts in a legitimate and natural manner. Diligent cultivation and study of the living tongue and of its earlier forms will make some amends for the loss of traditional lore and the spontaneity of literary creation, while the enthusiasm which a reviving language must evoke, and the effort made to revive it must exercise a beneficial influence on the character of the entire population.



II.—THE LIVING IRISH LANGUAGE A PRICELESS TREASURE TO THE IRISH RACE.

IRELAND possesses many relics of antiquity, round towers, ancient crosses, beehive cells, forts, duns and the like. She possesses old books of rare value, in which her ancient laws and customs are recorded. These treasures are carefully guarded by zealous votaries of antiquity. Not an adverse breath of wind is allowed to blow on the ancient ornaments, or the ancient books. Men differing in creed and politics unite in honouring these remains of antiquity and in explaining their significance to the world. Our country is justly proud of these ancient treasures, and no care is too great to safeguard them from the decomposing touch of time. But there is one relic of antiquity more precious than all the others taken together, which a large proportion of Irishmen are willing to let perish without a struggle and which certainly is in danger of disappearing from amongst us—and that is the living Irish speech. This noble relic differs from the other relics I have enumerated in this, that it is at the same time a relic of antiquity and a living institution. If all the Irish books and manuscripts that exist were destroyed the living Irish language spoken in Waterford or in Kerry would of itself afford unmistakeable evidence of the antiquity of our race, would give historians and philologists a clue to fixing the place of that race in the map of early peoples. The living language is of itself, independently of any early or recent documents, a true and genuine relic of antiquity. It is as if the round towers, instead of being preserved as fossil ornaments, continued till this hour to fulfil the functions for which they were originally designed. It is as if the churches, whose ruins now loom in solemn loneliness at Glendalough or Clonmacnoise, existed to the present hour as the daily receptacles of throngs of devout worshippers, it is as if Tara contained palaces and banquetting halls in the full blaze of life and beauty instead of green raths and deserted mounds. It is more than this; round towers, Clonmacnoise, Glendalough, Tara itself are but as yesterday when compared with the venerable antiquity of the Irish language. That language was in full vigour in Ireland centuries before

one stone was laid on another in Glendalough, and long even before kings and chiefs kept high festival at Tara. I have said it was a more precious inheritance than all our other monuments; it is a bold word, but I for one, had I to choose, as I hope I never shall have to choose between the ruins of Tara and the living Irish tongue, would not hesitate to say, perish Tara, but leave me the language of the Gael in its living state. If I were asked to choose between it and all the Irish MSS. that at present exist, I would not hesitate to consign the MSS. to destruction in order to save the living tongue. The enemies of the Irish language and the Irish people would pay great attention to the study and preservation of the Irish language were that language once safely relegated to MSS. and books, did it but cease to sound on the lips of living Irishmen and Irishwomen. What they cannot tolerate is the living witness to the antiquity and immemorial civilisation, to the distinctive character, to the greatness of the historic Irish race, that the living speech affords. Hide that language from the glare of the market place, from the public streets, from the modern press, bury it deep in MSS. and learned books, and then its false lovers will enshrine these MSS. and books in gold. They will give rich prizes for the study of them in Universities, they will never have done proclaiming their antiquity and importance. But seek to press it into public use, seek to restore it to its due place in domestic life, in literary life, in political life; seek to make it the living vehicle of Irish thought, seek to make it the instrument of living song, and these pretended friends appear in their true colours; they startle and rave and cry out:—

“Avaunt, and quit my sight, let the earth hide thee;
 Thy bones are marrowless, thy blood is cold,
 Thou hast no speculation in those eyes,
 Which thou dost glare with.”

We claim a living tongue fit for all the uses of life; they would present us with a fossil and a relic, a dead and dumb mummy of the past.

But our living language even in its living state, is a true relic of antiquity—a nobler and more perfect relic than any ever enshrined in gold. The language spoken by the Irish-speaking man carries the mind back to an age so remote that, compared with it, the Roman Empire is but a thing of yesterday, for that language is the natural and gradual growth and development of the primitive language of the early inhabitants of this island. Irish is one of the oldest languages in Europe. It is difficult to fix its absolute or relative age. If I were to say

that it is an older language than Greek, it would not be altogether safe to contradict me. No doubt, the existing written monuments of the early stages of the language are few, but they are enough to prove that the modern speech has sprung by a gradual process of growth from the primitive tongue. There has been no violent transformation, no sudden despoiling of some learned language of half its wealth; the language spoken now in Munster is the identical language which Zeuss studied in his *Grammatica Celtica*, only that it is so many centuries older, and that it is more fully developed. Words have been borrowed from Latin, Anglo-Saxon and other sources, but their number and importance are inconsiderable, and they do not at all touch the natural syntax of Irish speech. There is scarce a language in Europe that has preserved its continuous identity so distinctly as Irish has. It is, therefore, a precious relic of antiquity—that is, in its living state—which all true Irishmen should rally round and guard as a priceless heirloom handed down to them by their ancestors from the remotest ages; an heirloom that tells of a distinct and isolated civilization, of a flourishing literature, of a refinement, of a highly developed legal system, of the arts of war and peace practised on the banks of the Shannon and the Boyne, before most of the nations of modern Europe had emerged from the polar night of barbarism in which they so long slept.

With this language living on their lips, it requires no learned argument, no very deep antiquarian research, no weighing of skulls or other anthropological devices to pronounce the people that inhabit the western and southern seaboard of our island the true descendants of the ancient race that left their mark on every country almost in Europe, from the Tiber to the Tagus, from the Hellespont to the Baltic, that slowly receded before the onset of Roman power chafing in their wrath as they went even as the northern waves chafe and dash themselves on the ice-bound shores of Norway, the same people that settled down, long before the dawn of our history, on the plains of Meath and Ossory, or amid the purple hills of Kerry. The Irish speaker carries about with him proofs—all but irrefragable—of the antiquity of his race, of its past triumphs, of its heroism, of its glory. He bears about with him a relic of antiquity which all the gold of the British Empire could not purchase. Let him go into a foreign country—as he too often does—he cannot take with him the Rath of Tara, or the Round Tower of Kildare—but he bears with him his native speech which is a truer passport to antiquity than these. Destroy this relic and you remove one of the most obvious means of distinguishing the Irish race from their neighbours. You destroy what is at once a proof and a remnant of the remotest antiquity. It is de-

pressing to see the concern which some of our archeologists show for the preservation of some window in an old ruined cloister, some earthen mound, or some druidical cromlech, while at the same time they are content to let the living speech of their race fade and languish and die. No doubt every relic of antiquity should be preserved; but even in relics of antiquity, a sense of proportion should be observed, and he, surely, but ill understands the true meaning of antiquity who would deem a window or an arch a relic of the past more precious than the flood tide of a living vernacular speech.

The living Irish language, then, considered as a relic of the remotest antiquity, is a precious heirloom to the Irish people. But it is not as a relic of antiquity alone that it should be prized by Irishmen. It is a relic of antiquity, but a living relic. It is an ancient language, but it is suffering from none of the inconvenience of old age. Its bones are not marrowless, its blood is not cold; it is to-day as fresh and vigorous, as pliant, as subtle, as copious, as majestic, as sweet, as melifluous as when it resounded in the halls of Tara, or waked the echoes round the palaces of Eamhain or Cruachan. It is, indeed, suffering; it is in straits and difficulties, it is low and weak, it exhibits symptoms which its enemies pronounce to be the effect of old age, but which its friends know to be the effect of confinement, of torture, of privation, of starvation, of exclusion from the light of day. Its enemies would prescribe the rest and quiet and withdrawal from publicity that becomes the feeble and aged. But we diagnose the case more accurately, we know the vigorous blood that is still coursing in its veins, we know that its step is still light on the mountain, we want to bring it forth from an unjust confinement: we want it to breathe the free air of heaven—to bound freely to the sound of native music, to sing its own songs, to tell its own stories by the happy fireside, to rejoice in the society of its friends, to weave new rythms, to captivate our hearts with its matchless strains. We seek to fill its soul with gladness, with the joy of life, with the glory of a fresh and renovated existence. We seek to make its accents resound once more in town and city and in the broad plains and beside the silver streams of holy Ireland. For it is veritably a living speech—a speech long unused for purposes of literature and fresh and glowing with the energy of reserved and husbanded force. There are some who would not consider the poems of Eoghan Ruadh, or of Tadhg Gaedhealach great literature. What constitutes great literature is to some extent a matter of taste. But no one can deny that the living Irish speech, as it appears in these poems, is instinct with vital energy. The rush of the verse reminds us of the surging Atlantic as it breaks in upon our western coast; it reminds us of the headlong torrents

that dash themselves to the plain from the Kerry mountains in the rainy season. You cannot speak of the language of which these poems are a specimen as intrinsically moribund. You may starve it out; you may thin the ranks of those who speak it, you may forbid its use in the light of day, but you are chaining, maltreating, starving, not a decrepid, bloodless, sightless thing, bowed down with age, but something full of life and youthful vigour—a language, I venture to say, more fresh and vigorous, more powerful than most of the languages of Europe. That language has been moulded into its present shape by the accumulated passion of a highly strung race. Its unsurpassed power of melody is the result of centuries of song. Its softness and tenderness are the outcome of generations of growing refinement; its richness and copiousness bear testimony to a people gifted with an eloquence but rarely granted to man. Though this language is no longer spoken on the plains of Limerick or Tipperary or Meath, it does not follow that the people who inhabit these plains have no part in it. Did not their ancestors for ages and ages help to mould it into its present shape? It is the common inheritance of the Irish people. Though now confined to a few small districts, it contains within itself the concentrated essence of all the mighty forces that have been acting in the field of Irish history—the combined resultant of all the best qualities of the entire Irish race. It is like an electric battery: all it requires is opportunity and apparatus to send a live thrill to the most distant climes and to the remotest ages. Let it but once become a dead and learned language, as it threatens to become, and all its energizing power is lost. Its written records, even those of a recent date, lose their vigour and force and freshness, and the songs of Eoghan Ruadh and those of O'Rahilly would lose more than half their meaning. Their splendid resonance would fall like a dull jingle on ears unaccustomed to the genuine ring of living Irish speech. They would have no power of fertilization did there not co-exist a body of readers to whom the language is as natural as the air they breathe. Poems, like those of Eoghan Ruadh and O'Rahilly, have a powerful dynamic force which can only produce its effect through the medium of the living tongue. We need real, genuine successors to these poets—men to hand on the torch of poetry and passion, of Irish feeling, of true Irish genius to future ages; but a succession to them is impossible without a live medium; instead of a real succession we should have only the cold, passionless, soulless imitation of students and fad-dists. Allow our speech to perish and not only will these great monuments of Irish genius lose more than half their meaning, but the long struggle of the Irish mind for self-expression will have little or no result in the production of our

future literature. We cannot attune the English language at this time of the day, to all the tender emotions, all the majestic symphonies, all the vigorous outbursts of the historic Irish spirit. If we lose our natural medium of expression we shall lose many of the best fruits of our struggle for truth and justice; we shall be unable to set our thoughts with due force and distinctness before the world.

At the present moment the living Irish speech is threatened with extinction. In Munster, the only province which has maintained a high class literature with almost unbroken continuity down to our time, the area of vernacular Irish has reached the lowest point. Reduce it further and for national purposes, for purposes of literary use, it will cease to be worth serious consideration. If it is to be preserved it must be not only strengthened where it is now, but extended to the neighbouring districts where there are some remnants of it left, and where it has but just gone out. For a live language, circumstanced as Irish, is like the sea-tide. It never remains stationary; if it is not coming in, it is going out. If you desire to know whether it is holding its own, find out whether it is advancing. If it be not advancing, then it is not even holding its own—it is receding.

I shrink from asking the question—is the living Irish speech advancing in Munster? Is it acquiring new territory? Is it setting neighbouring districts ablaze with the energy of its living fire? To insure a permanent existence for the language, growth and extension are absolutely necessary. Growth and extension are easy in many districts where the language is still spoken, or can be spoken by the adult population, but has just gone out of use among the young. Growth and extension, too, are necessary for the kindling of true poetic passion, for the production of a genuine and racy literature. A literary production, whether it be poem, oration, or story, if it have the true ring of life in it, supposes a sympathetic audience of reasonable extent—an audience, too, of wide and varied view, of diverse pursuit, of learned leisure, of literary instinct. At the present moment the vernacular speech is confined, as a rule, to men who have no book-learning, who have no leisure for education or for literary effort, amongst whom literature has dwindled down to a few folk songs, and who have lost some of the finest traditional lore of their race. Speaking generally, such an audience is insufficient to stimulate a great writer to the production of a work of genius. It cannot be doubted, too, that in the process of receding within such narrow limits the language lost much of its literary sap—that it was forced to yield much that the poet, the historian, the romancer would prize. The language has, no doubt, somewhat deteriorated during the last century, but it is a deterioration that can be

made good especially by the aid of the great poetic productions of the eighteenth century.

The growth and extension of the vernacular must take place gradually, and begin in those districts where the language is still in a moribund state. But a widespread study of the language throughout the entire island and amongst the Irish race in Britain and America and elsewhere is certain to act as a powerful stimulus to present and future writers. You cannot, indeed, at present plant vernacular Irish in Dublin or Belfast, in Liverpool or Chicago. But you lift Irish literature to a higher level by creating an enthusiastic Irish reading public in these cities—a public who enjoy Irish wit, who grow enamoured of the haunting melody of Irish song, who watch with an intelligent interest every new production in Irish that issues from the press. Energy and zeal and enthusiasm count for much in the matter of language and literature, and in some cases bid fair almost to compensate for the loss of the vernacular speech. I can bear testimony to the enthusiasm I have seen over and over again among Dublin students, old and young, male and female. I have witnessed amongst them a living ardour, a devouring thirst for a knowledge of the National tongue which made me feel ashamed of my own negligence and remissness. Dublin is very distant from any Irish-speaking district, yet in the heart of that great city—there is springing up a race of men and women who are drinking in eagerly the true traditional Irish spirit, who are seeking in the living Irish language the genuine expression of that spirit and who by their energy and enthusiasm are kindling a fire in the land which the most determined opposition only strengthens, and which, in time, will mount up to heaven an unconquerable and glorious blaze. Dublin is doing much, but it is from a border city like Waterford that the most effective work may be expected. A considerable fringe of Waterford County is Irish-speaking. Almost the entire county could, by zeal and energy, become Irish-speaking. The language tide is but just going out in the entire county. It is still capable of being turned. We should aim at turning it, and making it roll back in such a volume, with such force and momentum that it may submerge for ever the false and mischievous spirit that its ebbing has given rise to. It is in border-lands like Waterford that the real battle for the language has to be fought. Show me some conquered territory, show me a town or village, one small spot of land to which Irish speech has been restored, and I will admit that your movement is making progress. If you fail to show me that, whatever else you may boast of. I must declare that you are losing in the strife, that the tide is ebbing never again to return.

The living Irish speech, then, is beyond question one of the most precious heirlooms of which any nation can boast. It is the most interesting linguistic relic of these northern latitudes. It is not a relic alone, but a living energising power full of potentiality, aglow with suppressed passion. In preserving this relic from the depredations of time, we are not embalming a mummy—we are not writing some splendid epitaph on a sarcophagus. No. We have only to give food, fresh air and exercise to a living being.

Let its accents once more be heard in our streets, in our assemblies, in our places of worship, around the hearth-fire, in the school-room; let it sound on the lips of the old and the young, of the learned and the unlearned. Let it become again the vehicle of song and story; let us but try to speak it, write it, sing it, and it will begin to quicken and live in those places where its enemies believed it dead beyond redemption. It will sprout again as the hawthorn by the wayside—so bare and desolate all the long winter—sprouts in the opening spring. It will spring up into flower, and fruit, and gladden the earth with its fragrance and its beauty. With our language it is a second spring. It is a revival when all around believed that age's frost had chilled its blood and withered its features to unsightliness and distortion—it is a revival almost past hope. It is a revival so contrary to the natural renovation in the physical world that foreign nations look on in wonder at what is taking place amongst us. They look on arrested by a phenomenon unique in the history of nations—a phenomenon that seems to bear the impress of God's hand, that is allied to the miraculous and the Divine: the phenomenon of a language which had, by the force of a relentless persecution, by the tyranny of enforced ignorance, been ousted from town after town, from village after village of the land until it was forced to take insecure refuge among crags and barren sea-boards, whose accents had fallen into such contempt that they became the emblems of slavery and degradation, whose written records were buried in such oblivion that the great poets who made it the vehicle of their passionate outbursts were lost to the memory of the nation—that this venerable language should suddenly burst forth from the glens and caverns of our highlands; that it should intrude itself into the fashionable streets of the city; that it should force its way into the council chambers, the mansions of the wealthy, the house of prayer; that its voice should ring not with the piping notes of age, but with all the thrilling music peculiar to youth; that it should be again held in honour by bards and sages; that its great poets should shake off the dust of centuries and rise resplendent as from the grave of the forgotten to irrigate the land with the rushing tide of their song. It is a pheno-

menon which no other nation in Christendom can present, and it is no idle phenomenon—no barren wonder.

That living language is the inheritance of the whole Irish race at home and in foreign climes. Of all the peoples of these modern times there is scarce a race of men more widely scattered over the globe than ours. The influence that we wield in the politics of the world—in the literature of the world, in the Church, in the senate—is very great. We have gone through a Red Sea of persecution and oppression. We have gone through physical and mental persecution for the sake of our ancient language. The effort made to destroy that language has all but succeeded. But now the Irish race not only in Ireland, but the world over, is making up its mind that that ancient language is to be restored to its due place in our national system. The energy, the self-discipline, the courage, the heroism which are being called forth by that resolve, and which will continue to be called forth, are certain to brace up powerfully the entire race, to deepen the national characteristics that distinguish us from other peoples, to wean us from all that is defiling and enervating in neighbour literatures, to incite us to drink in our own traditional spirit from the genuine monuments of our own literature, to teach us to look to our own country as our true mother, as the centre of our hopes, as the first object of our love. Were there no other benefit to be derived from the revival of our ancient language than this, it would repay the energy expended on it, but there can be no doubt that rich and permanent fruit of literature may be expected from it. I know that little or nothing of permanent value has been written in Irish since the revival of the language began seriously to engage the attention of the nation at large. But we are only in the commencement of the struggle. You cannot expect a ripe literature from a language while its very existence is trembling in the balance. We must first create an audience of sufficient extent and of sufficient diversity of tastes, to arouse the enthusiasm of great writers. In the process of creating such an audience the heart of the Irish race will be deeply stirred, and from out its depths there will spring a literature, fresh and vigorous, and charged with all the noblest qualities of our ancient and imperishable race.

III.—THE IRISH LANGUAGE THE NATIONAL LANGUAGE OF IRELAND.

WHEN we consider the circumscribed area in which Irish is a vernacular speech, and the slight hold it has on the public bodies of the country, and how sadly it is neglected by the State and by State institutions, it requires some courage, some confidence in our cause, to claim for that language the distinction of being the national language of Ireland. Nevertheless it is a claim whose justice it is impossible to deny. As the old Cyclopiian and Pelasgic structures represent the ancient civilization of the race of people that we now call the historic Irish, as the ancient and ruined shrines and crosses and carved windows represent the form of worship that became national in Ireland, and held its ground in the teeth of State establishments, of persecution, of the zealous fostering of a rich rival; as the Irish peasant, despised and crushed and ostracised, as he has been for centuries, represents to-day the historic Irish race, so the Irish language, crushed, broken, trampled on, jeered at in the streets, scarcely finding a congenial home under the roof tree of the poorest fisherman of Connemara or Iveragh, is the only language that represents human thought as it has grown and developed in the minds of the Irish race. It is the only language that can express in full the passionate yearnings for what is true and beautiful, the ardent and enthusiastic spirit, the live wit, the melting pathos, the keen satire that characterize our old-world people; it is the only language in which their native fervour can have full play, in which full justice can be done to their imaginative and artistic instincts; it is the only language that deserves to be styled the national language of Ireland. A national language must not be a thing of yesterday; it is the language that has moulded the thought and expressed the aspirations of a nation for a long period of time; it is the language that has enshrined itself in a nation's memory, and that is indissolubly linked with its traditions; it is the language of its most thrilling songs, of its wisest precepts, of its warmest affection, of its most glowing ardour; it has come down the slope of time laden with many a wise saying,

with many a tuneful lay, rich with thrilling memories of the battle field and the chase, glowing like a furnace with the fire of a nation's enthusiasm. The simplest words in such a language that the infant learns at its mother's knee have an influence in moulding its character that all the learning of the schools could not give. If it disappear, its place cannot be supplied even by the most renowned language in the world. If Irish were to be wiped out to-morrow as a living speech, English could not supply its place as our national language. We should have no national language in any important sense of the word.

Up to the opening years of the eighteenth century, English had made little headway in Ireland, there was practically no literature in English, either written by Irishmen or circulating in any very considerable portion of this island. The Irish language and Irish literature were everywhere; they had captured the minds and the imaginations of the people. During the eighteenth century the English colony in Ireland, and the native Irish who were brought up to English, cultivated the English language to such good purpose that they outshone their English rivals during the same period in the excellence of their literary productions. Men like Goldsmith, Parnell, Swift, Burke, and Sheridan, have shed lasting glory both on the country of their birth and on English letters. Nevertheless, writers such as these, with all their excellences, did not express the heart and mind of the historic Irish race. Their works have, undoubtedly, an Irish flavour, but their souls did not drink in Irish traditional lore; they had, in a manner, cut themselves adrift from the historic current of Irish life. They spoke for the Pale and for the Ascendancy, for the stentghening and consolidating of British power, for the glory of the British flag. The traditions they served to perpetuate were English or Anglo-Irish, rather than Irish traditions. The masses of the people toiled on in slavery, in hardship, in poverty, leading their own traditional lives and giving vent to their emotions in their old-world language. They suffered a fiendish persecution, their religion was banned, and they were subjected to inhuman civil disabilities. The more gifted among them gave vent to their feelings in their own way. The true expression of Irish feeling during these years of pain and sorrow is to be found not in the pages of Swift or Parnell, of Burke or Sheridan, but in the burning lines of O'Rahilly, MacDonnell, and Eoghan Ruadh. Their poetry, and such poetry as theirs, and that poetry alone, is the true Irish literature of that period. The language in which they gave vent to their emotions, and that language alone, was at that age the national language of Ireland. The historian of the painful

era of persecution that succeeded the Revolution, if he wishes to reach the true inwardness of Irish feeling, will study these poems rather than the speeches of Burke, or the pamphlets of Swift.

From the dawn of the nineteenth century onward, the Irish language was steadily starved out, and its place taken by English. The great famine and the subsequent stream of emigration that set in across the Atlantic, helped to root the language of the stranger in the greater portion of the island. English monopolised the schools and all the public offices, it took hold of the press, and the pulpit, and forced its way into the homesteads in the most distant and inaccessible regions. One might have thought that English literature would thrive and prosper with the growth and extension of the English language. But, no. From the early years of the nineteenth century onward, the quality of English literature in England steadily declined, and has been declining to this hour. Anglo-Irish literature during the same period, in so far as it was an imitation literature, declined no less. In so far as it drew its inspirations from Irish traditions it attained a certain mediocrity; but, on the whole, the literature written in English by Irishmen during the nineteenth century does not reach a high level, and never succeeded in capturing the imagination or enlisting the sympathy of the bulk of the people. I have no desire to undervalue the poetry of Moore, or Mangan, or Ferguson, or the Young Ireland writers. I wish to do full justice to the oratorical genius of Grattan, Shiel, O'Connell, and Plunkett. I appreciate, too, as highly as any man, the novels of Banim, of Lever, and of Carleton. But after full justice is meted out to the literary power of these great Irishmen, it must be admitted that Anglo-Irish literature in the nineteenth century has not struck deep roots, has failed to touch the heart of the nation, has failed to express the true undertones of Irish emotion, has failed to touch the chords whose vibrations reach the heart of the nation.

English literature in Ireland during the past century has been a failure, it has left a craving and a void in the national mind. Whatever successes it has obtained are derivable from the ancient language and literature of Erin rather than from its imitation of English models. At the present moment the prospect is no brighter. The English language is overrun with the weeds of triteness and vulgarity. Its vocabulary is being daily increased in all directions. Science, art, history, economics, industries, athletics, horse racing, gambling, and the rest are claiming to be heard. The quality of poetry has declined; the quality of the drama has declined. Prose in its richest domains has declined; the novel, a plant of recent

growth, has lost its strength and flavour and lives on sensation, pruriency or mawkishness. I see little prospect of improvement for English literature in Ireland. The traditional English drama is played out. Few now cultivate English poetry, and fewer still with any semblance of success. English oratory is almost unknown amongst us. Perhaps the bar and the pulpit were never so sterile in great orators as at this moment. The novel in Ireland is well nigh extinct. There is little of characteristic, racy prose to be had. Large sums are expended on primary and secondary education, all in English, but neither system has produced votaries of the Muses, or even respectable worshippers at humbler shrines. The voice of the muse of history is hushed by the death of Lecky. Whether educated or illiterate, the common people have lost their wit, their vivacity, their humour, to a large extent; these qualities do not seem capable of full infusion into the English language. The countryman, whose father and grandfather revelled in the Irish language, composed extempore verses, and flashed off sprightly repartees in that language, now speaks only English, and has lost his vigour of mind. His most inspiring lays are, mayhap, the refuse of a foreign music hall; the literature that delights him is the weekly serial that comes across the Channel. There has been in his case a sudden snapping of traditional life; a sudden chasm has been created, in which the manliness and simplicity of our ancestors have gone down. A darkening of the understanding, a weakness of the will have come upon us, clouded our souls, blunted our energies, and left this generation incapable of the vigorous and simple thought of which their ancestors could boast. A language then, which has become so widespread in the country, which has been fostered with such care, which has had a monopoly of education, but which has, nevertheless, produced fruit so meagre, or lapsed into barrenness so wholesale, has not made good its claim to be considered the national language, as long as her more ancient rival is alive and strong enough to dispute the title.

Alive, certainly, that rival is, though suffering from starvation and confinement. The Irish language is some sixty or seventy years behindhand considered as a cultivated living speech. The area in which it is used is reduced to small dimensions; nevertheless, as a medium of literary expression, it has several advantages over its rival. It has never been vulgarized, it possesses very little slang, its vocabulary is rich and copious in words and turns of phrase that express the emotions of the soul, its allusions are mainly to the deeds performed in the heroic ages of Irish history, it has been tuned to exquisite melody by long ages of poetic cultivation. The pressman, the reviewer, the sketchy writer, the penny-a-

liner, have not yet laid unholy hands upon it. It is the language of simple, direct thought, of domestic affection, of sincerity, of loyalty, of faith; it is the language of pathos, of human sympathy, of "fierce wars and faithful love." It is the language of simple, earnest devotion, of the deep-seated virtues of a gifted race; it is the language of courage and heroism, of wit and humour. The areas over which it is spoken represent the Irish race in their natural development, unspoiled by a corrupting and imported civilization. The people in these districts have passed through the Red Sea of bitter persecution; they have been long deprived of the benefits of education; they have their faults and weaknesses, but they retain unspoiled all the best qualities of the traditional Irish race, and these qualities find their most natural expression in their native language. In proportion as that language is cultivated, and its empire extended, will these qualities take deeper root and exercise wider influence, and produce more lasting effects that will tend to the development of Irish ideals and Irish character. The battle is beginning to be fought between Irish and English on the soil of Ireland. Each language has its legitimate place and its own proper functions, but there is a sense in which they are struggling at this moment for supremacy.

The struggle between the languages is a deeper, a more far-reaching struggle that appears on the surface, it is a struggle between the civilizations which these languages represent, and of which they are the most natural channels of expression. The extinction of Irish as a living speech, would mean the predominance of foreign civilization, of foreign ideals, of foreign customs, of foreign vices. I shall not now say anything hard of what English civilization was in its prime. Let us grant that it was excellent. But it is no longer in its prime, it is fast breaking up and giving place to vulgarity. It is a mighty wreck that threatens to submerge the smaller crafts that are battling with the waves. It is a ruin that is fast debasing the minds and enfeebling the bodies of the people, it is wiping out the great landmarks of morals, it is creating difficulties that may become insurmountable for the ruler and statesman. The civilization that moulded England to greatness is fast becoming a corrupt system of life and a positive national danger. A civilization, no matter what may have been its triumphs in the past, must be judged by its present fruits. The extension of the domain of science, the growth of wealth, the spread of commerce, the progress of manufactures may co-exist in a country with the rapid physical and moral deterioration of the people. It is the simple, old-world virtues of our ancestors that alone can save us from the ruin with which we are threatened, and these vir-

tues grow up and flourish wherever our language exists. The Irish language is their natural guardian, it is the natural medium for their expression. Remove it from the scene, and the virtues are certain to droop and die.

Irish then, should, other things being equal, be preferred to English. It will obviously take a long time and much hard work to repair the ravages that long neglect and positive ill-treatment have made upon it. It will take more serious efforts than have yet been made in any part of Ireland to lift it out of the slough of despond in which it has been allowed to settle. It is, as we saw, some sixty or seventy years behindhand as a cultivated speech. It has been 3,000 years amongst us, and are we to abandon it now because it is a little behind in scientific terminology, and in sensational literature? All that requires to be done in order to put our language on a par with other languages in up-to-date use, is to stimulate the rising talent and energy of the country to devote themselves to its cultivation with even half the vigour they expend on many of the worthless items on our modern programmes of education. As is the education of its rising race, so will be the nation. If the youth of the country have their energies wasted on a host of useless subjects during the best part of their school career, then the nation will in time be unable to concentrate its energy on the great problems of national life. If in our leading educational establishments, the rising youths are not taught to attach first importance to the things that pertain to the nation's honour and self-respect, they will necessarily grow up degraded Irishmen and fit subjects for becoming the victims of all the evil effects of foreign civilization.

We must not take a short-sighted view of our history or of our national aspirations. We must not forget that there are numerous generations of Irishmen to live after us, we must not do anything to shut out from them the natural tradition of the historic speech of their ancestors. Woe to that Irishman who is not proud of his ancestors, of their history, of their vigorous spirit, of the glorious heritage of heroism and faith that is enshrined in their language. Woe to the Irishman who is not proud of that ancient language, and who will not make sacrifices to hand it down in its living warmth to future ages. Sixty or seventy years of a blank disfigure the pages of its literature. But what are 60 or 70 years when compared with the countless ages of a nation's life. Is the thread of continuity of perhaps the oldest civilization in Europe, to be snapped asunder forever on that account, and is this crime against a nation's honour and self-respect to be perpetrated in an age when the peoples of the earth are endeavouring to rescue from oblivion every fragment of antiquity

that the corroding touch of time has spared them; at a time when millions of money are expended in striving to drag into the light of day every record, every footprint of primæval man? Is our nation alone, just at the moment that it is emerging from the storm-cloud of persecution and oppression, just at the time that it is beginning to find a voice that will ring through the world, to permit the language that has been the instrument of its thought for ages, to be torn up by its living roots and flung by the wayside to wither and to die. That living speech is the fosterer of genius, of self-reliance, of national pride; it gilds our history, it illumines our traditions and legends, it stamps us with the unmistakable stigma of individual nationhood, it is a truer claim to national greatness than giant navies or mines of gold. Navies and gold may be wrenched from us by a stronger force, but our own language may, if we will it, be as perennial amongst us as the verdure of our meadows, as the cliffs of our foam-washed coasts.

The argument of material advancement is often raised against the pretensions of our national language. But the time seems at hand when a nation's material advancement will follow in the wake of national dignity and self-respect, and will be commanded by title-deeds to antiquity and past greatness. In these latter ages the world is scrutinizing closely the history of nations, examining into their pedigree, and their claim to nobility and renown. Juster ideas of the science of history are beginning to prevail. The blood-stained crest of the conqueror will not save from execration, a mean, a blood-thirsty and a grasping race. A people that have ever stood on the side of truth, of honour, of high ideals, even though worsted in battle, will win the admiration and respect of future ages. The peoples of the earth are looking back across the centuries for traces of kinship with one another, are gathering together every vestige of their ancient traditions, and this is the time that we choose wantonly to cast from us the living speech that is our truest passport to antiquity, the greatest of the monuments of our ancient civilization and our ancient fame. It is a mad, rash act for which our children and children's children will weep un-availing tears.

Since, then, Irish is the national language of Ireland, and since the country is beginning to awaken to a sense of that fact, it behoves the public bodies throughout the country and the scholastic institutions to treat that language with the reverence due to its dignity, to serve it with the zeal which genuine patriotism inspires. The institutions to which I refer are the accredited mouthpiece of the nation's will; to them it looks for guidance and assistance in moments of cri-

sis. Shall it be said that when certain classes of the community are banding themselves together in one supreme effort to preserve in its purity the ancient speech of their motherland, when they are endeavouring to preserve the golden traditions of 3,000 years—those traditions that stamp their country with the sign of characteristic, distinct nationhood—to preserve them from being swallowed up in the vortex of a decaying and degenerate civilization, shall it be said that these public bodies folded their arms and looked on with indifference. If the supreme struggle which our venerable language is now making to regain its lost dominions, arouse not one feeling of national sentiment, excite not one spark of national honour in the hearts of our public bodies, if it induce them not to come to its aid, armed with their representative power, let them sink unmolested into the degradation to which they are hastening, a degradation national in its extent and irreparable in its evil; let them freely lavish public money on the English language; that language, an excellent speech in the mouths of Englishmen, will become on their lips and on the lips of their children the despicable jargon of helots and slaves.



IV.—THE PRESERVATION OF THE LIVING IRISH LANGUAGE A WORK OF NATIONAL IMPORTANCE.

It often happens in Ireland that a work which, from its magnitude and importance, could be dealt with in a satisfactory manner only by the State, a work which is of national importance, is left to the zeal of private individuals or private societies. Such is the fate of the work of publishing and elucidating our wealth of Irish MSS. Such, too, is the fate of a greater, more difficult, and more important work still, the preservation of the Irish language as a living speech. This work, which in a normal condition of things, should occupy the attention of statesmen, and should be liberally subsidized from the public purse, is left to the zeal and energy of a private organization like the Gaelic League. Not only does this organization get no aid from the State funds, not only does it get no encouragement from those in power, but, moreover, not the least of its difficulties is the circumstance that the State policy for centuries, in official and educational matters, has not been content with ignoring the existence of the Irish language, but has been eminently calculated to uproot it, and banish it from the land. That policy has also, to a great extent, succeeded. As a result of that policy the Irish-speaking areas have dwindled down to the very lowest dimensions compatible with reasonable hope in the future life of the language. As a result of that policy there are to be found to-day on the soil of Ireland, hosts of men and women who claim to be called Irish—men and women, too, in influential positions, many of whom are responsible for the education of the rising generation—who are ready to do all that a rising public opinion would tolerate to wipe out every vestige of the living Irish tongue from the lips of our rising race. As a result of that policy, there is to be found in Ireland the extraordinary phenomenon of educated men who go about the country, camera in hand, and provided with due apparatus for the deciphering of old inscriptions, who pass their time in measuring the crumbling

arches of our ancient churches, and making sketches of ruined gables or pointed windows, who at the same time loathe and despise the living language venerable in its antiquity, but fresh and vigorous as when the world was young. The study of our ancient monuments in stone and wood is an important work, and should be cherished by all who love their country. But what are we to think of the men who pursue this study to the point of making it a craze, who, at the same time, if they had their way, would obliterate every trace of a monument, a living monument, of such high antiquity that compared to it the oldest stone fort in Ireland is but of yesterday, a monument whose testimony in favour of our antiquity and ancient greatness as a race, is clearer and more convincing than that of all the other remains of antiquity to be found in this island taken together? When we remember the attitude of the State and of State supported institutions towards the living language, we can scarcely wonder that so many Irishmen are to be found ready to do all in their power to destroy that language, to place it beyond relief or hope. The attitude of such Irishmen towards the language is partly due to prejudice and partly to ignorance. There is no Irishman worthy of the name, who, if he fully understood the importance of the living Irish language in our national economy, would willingly allow that language to perish.

The preservation of living Irish is a work that in dignity and importance rises far above the warfare of present-day political parties; it is a work that all Irishmen of whatever creed or political opinions should assist in performing. Political parties come and go; constitutional combinations of states are made and are dissolved; empires rise and fall, but throughout the changing history of nations, when dynasties have been set up and pulled down, when cities shall have risen to unparalleled renown and dwindled down to ruined villages, when healing time has wiped away the blood of battlefields, it will still remain true, if we lose our language, that within the wide seas that encircle this island shall dwell a people whose ancestors possessed that living speech as their birthright and heritage, and who could have saved it from extinction at a critical point in its life, but neglected to do so. Should the language die the death with which it is now threatened, the loss to the nation will be great and irreparable. Other national losses are capable of being made good. The loss of population, the loss of armies and navies, the loss of prestige, the loss of power, the loss of liberty can all be restored; but once a language becomes extinct as the living medium of thought, it is as impossible to restore it to

life and vigour as it is to re-animate a lifeless and decaying corpse.

It is difficult to forecast the political future of this island. I speak not as a politician, but as a student of history when I say that the conglomeration of countries and islands that are marked red on our present maps, and called the British Empire, will not always cling together. The Roman Empire had far stronger bonds of union than the British, and yet that great Empire, even in the zenith of its power, had clay mingled with its feet of iron and nurtured the seeds of disruption which grew strong in time and shattered it to a thousand fragments. The British Empire will burst up as the Roman did. Nay, the bonds of constitutional government that unite this island to the larger island across the Channel, have no perpetuity in the nature of things. These two islands have been united under the same monarchy for 300 years. But what are 300 years in the life of a nation. The day may come, it may not be far distant, when this island may have to lead a separate political life, or enter into some new combination and form part of a new Empire. The day may come when the prestige and importance of the English language will not be what it is now. Even now, as a literary language, English is fast waning. The past 50 years have witnessed a deterioration in the quality of English literature which has no parallel since the age of Chaucer, and which seems on the increase as years go by. There seems no chance of an aftermath of English literature, till youthful nations infuse their vigour into dialects of that language. Imagine the state of things that may exist a hundred or two hundred years hence. The British Empire shorn of most of its territory. Ireland and England no longer under the same government. New Empires, new dynasties sharing between them the sovereignty of the civilized world. The English language melting down in the crucible and new dialects springing up. Imagine, if you can, the loss, the incalculable loss to this country if every vestige of living Irish shall have been wiped out. Three or four hundred years spent under the shadow of the British constitution, and we emerge bearing the most unmistakeable of all badges of slavery, the badge of a slavery that not only enslaved the body, but that also corroded the mind—the very accents, the tone, the speech of our masters. When we have lost our language—then, and not till then, shall we be veritable slaves.

Try to imagine the loss to our country if, in these no very distant days perhaps, all she can point to as memorials of her antiquity, as evidences of her pedigree among the nations of the earth, as proofs of her past greatness, be a few

old manuscripts in a disused character, a few old ruins, a few inscriptions on stone, while that living voice of Irish speech, that re-echoed amid her hills for three thousand years, is hushed into silence for ever. That voice might have been preserved as a living witness to the high antiquity of our people, to their ancient lineage among the nations, as the living nurse and fosterer of immemorial traditions and dreams of a glorious past. Consider the advantage of a living witness over a witness that is dead and gone. The evidence of a dead witness may be misrepresented, you cannot cross-examine him, you cannot piece together his story with all the colouring of time and place; you may question a living witness, each new question may reveal truths long hidden, may drag to light evidence of the utmost moment.

The living tongue, even though the area over which it is vernacular be circumscribed, is an energizing power in the land. It is a compendium of our history, it is our fierce war-cry in the conflict of nationalities, it is our title-deed in the court of nations. It is the voice of promise alluring us to a higher and nobler national existence. Its reviving tones salute our ears at the opening of the new century as a trumpet call reminding us that we have been dwelling in Babylonian bondage, warning us not to eat the unclean meats, not to quaff the sorcerer's cup proffered to us by our captors, telling us that already many of our people are drunk to swinish drunkenness with the alluring wine of a foreign civilization, that already many of them are sunk hopelessly in all that is vulgar and barbarous of foreign customs and habits. That living speech will train up the rising generation in all the traditions of their ancestors, it will keep alive those characteristics that individualize our race, it will keep alive our spirit of chivalry, of heroism, of generosity, of faith. It will nurse the simplicity of character which distinguished our forefathers, it will waft across the centuries the breeze of romance and enthusiasm from the days when kings held high festival at Tara and at Cruachan, when gay huntsmen from Eastern climes gambolled on the green sward of Meath and of Kildare, when men revelled with the new wine of life, of beauty, and of strength.

Woe to us if ever that living nurse of our ancient traditions is lost to our race! Woe to us if we let the national spirit of our children perish from want of being duly nursed in our history through the living accents of Irish speech! Woe to us if we are forced to nurture our national spirit merely on the dry bones of a dead and neglected tongue. I remember once hearing a folk-tale. A mother who was on her death-bed, had two daughters, one of whom she loved while she

hated the other. Both were present at her bed-side. She gave several heads of advice to them, but that advice was put in enigmatical language in order that the daughter whom she disliked may attach the wrong meaning to it. One point of advice was this:—"Always keep old bones under your children." It happened contrary to her expectations. The daughter she loved failed to penetrate the mystery of this advice, and took it in the literal sense; she had her children constantly seated on a heap of old bones, with the result that they caught cold and drooped and died. The other daughter was wiser, she, too, procured old bones for her children, but they were living bones, for she provided them with a careful old nurse who had them constantly in her arms. If the Irish nation of to-day discard the living Irish speech, contenting themselves with its remains in books and MSS., we shall be following the example of this foolish daughter, and our children shall lose their national spirit. If, on the contrary, we secure a living old nurse—the nurse of living Irish for the rising generation, they will grow up sound in mind and body, and perpetuate the historical traditions of their race. She is truly an old nurse, but though old, full of the vigour and sprightliness of youth, full of the glad music of happier days, full of the spirit of independence and self-reliance.

Let none believe our lovely Eve outworn and old;
 Fair is her form, her blood is warm, her heart is bold;
 Though tyrants long have wrought her wrong, she will not
 fawn,
 Will not prove mean our Caithilin Ni Hualachan.

It is true she is for the moment weak and helpless and prostrate, it is true the pallor of death seems settling on that fair cheek, it is true the love-light seems waning in those bewitching eyes, but all this is not the result of old age, it is the direct outcome of the confinement and torture and privation inflicted on her by false and cruel enemies, and by yet falser and crueller friends.

If these symptoms which are only temporary from their very nature are permitted to develop, if the Irish language perish, on the present generation will devolve the responsibility and the shame. They will incur the odium of refusing to hold out to it a saving hand in its hour of direst need. If the present generation fail to save the language, the language is lost for ever. In spite of a strong and widespread language movement vernacular Irish is dying fast, that terrible fact was taken as an axiom at the late Munster Con-

ference. I have no hesitation in saying that if the decay goes on at its present rate, this generation will witness the diminution of the vernacular area, not indeed to the vanishing point, but to limits which will preclude the hope of revival for ever. Three or four old men and women in a few scattered villages along the Western sea-coast cannot be classed as an Irish-speaking population. In a hundred and fifty years or so there may be papers read before learned societies discussing the question when and where did the last Irish speaker die. It is an uncomfortable picture to call up before the mind, but gushing and roseate language will not save the trembling accents of her expiring speech on the lips of our mother Erin. We must be prepared for the worst. While enthusiastic meetings and soul-inspiring processions fill our people with hope, and the gladsome strains of our native music haunt our minds, the more watchful amongst us hear, or think they hear, the faint distant echoes of the banshee's lonely wail wafted by the winds from the hills of Iveragh and Connemara, keening the approaching dissolution of our native speech. Methinks I hear that mournful wail in ever increasing volume rising up from the distant headlands of the Western coast, charged with the accumulated memories of 3,000 years—the doleful death-song of the dying Gael.

But I turn away my ears from that heart-rending dirge, I turn to where the battle on behalf of our language has to be fought out. While there is life there is hope, and there is still life. It is not death from old age that we have to fear for our language; no, it is rather death from starvation and cruel confinement, death from the treachery of false friends, rather than from the wounds inflicted by declared enemies. We will fight to the end. In this struggle those who are not for us are against us; those who do not gather with us scatter. Whatever hope exists for preserving our vernacular speech lies in the strength of the people's will. Let it be made a national question. Let the united voices of the entire nation proclaim that it must not die. Let the public bodies throughout the land insist that it be recognised in all its legitimate uses. It is true that at present it is strictly vernacular only over a small area. But it is nevertheless the common heritage of the nation, and the entire country from sea to sea should fight for it to the last. From the nature of the case, it is impossible for it to live and thrive in the small areas to which it is now confined without the sympathy and assistance of the entire nation. The wants of commerce, the facility of intercommunication throughout the country, the common political and religious ties that unite the popu-

lations of districts far apart, the identity of the public institutions throughout the land, all these causes render it necessary that the language of the poorer districts should pass current in every corner of the island, that it should be respected, and studied, and cultivated, even where it is not spoken as a birthright, that it should get every facility for growth and extension, that the brains and talents of the entire country should be placed at its disposal, to lift it up from the slough in which it has been allowed to settle for ages, that public bodies, that educational institutions should lay themselves out to catch up some of the living warmth of its flickering embers, and try to hand on its fire to future ages.

We must remember that our language is a growth, it is at the present moment either growing or drooping to decay; it is not stationary. If that precious relic of antiquity is to be preserved at all, it must be preserved by methods congenial to its nature, it must be preserved as a growth of any kind is preserved. This growth is planted on the soil of Ireland, it is planted in the hearts of the people. It is from the people of this island it is to derive its sap if it is to live and sprout; the soil must be prepared, must be manured. The people everywhere in Ireland, whether they are native speakers or not, can be made to contribute to the sap that is to sustain our living tree. Every branch of the League you cause to flourish in Ireland, every Irish song you learn to sing, every Irish air you play, every Irish book you learn to read—all help to create a soil congenial to the growth and development of our historic speech. In those parts of Ireland where the spoken Irish has completely gone out, persons who want an excuse for keeping clear of the language movement, say—"Irish is all very well for the districts where it is spoken, but of what use is it to us, we can never learn to speak it?" I reply—Irish is the common heritage of the Irish nation—its existence amongst us as a living speech is of such vast importance to our nation that it would be difficult to mention many national assets of greater value. It is a national property that should enrich the entire island, it is a national relic of transcendent beauty and lustre. What are the Gold Ornaments about which so much has been heard in comparison with our historic speech? It is of interest and importance to every man, woman, and child in Ireland. Now this priceless relic cannot be preserved by any means other than by a national effort. The people in the Irish-speaking districts cannot possibly preserve their language, cannot save it from the inroads of English unless their fellow-countrymen advance to their aid. Unless Irish

is respected, and studied, and spoken as well as may be in Blackrock and in Dublin, it will not continue to be spoken in Connemara or Innishowen.

Unless the public and official institutions are made to recognize and encourage Irish, the mere exigencies of modern life will expel it from the land. A demand for vernacular Irish in every walk of life must be created as well from sheer national spirit as from its educational value; the native speaker must be held in esteem whether he hail from the North, or the South, or the West. The continued existence of the language demands a readjustment of the social and industrial, and to some extent, of the political forces that are at play amongst us. The struggle for the life of the language should tend to unite Irishmen of all classes, of all political shades of opinion, of various creeds. The question at issue involves deeper interests than those which have given rise to any of the political or industrial movements that exist amongst us. Already there are portions of the island where sound and helpful views are entertained and put in practice on this question. The resolutions passed and the practical steps taken by the clergy of the Diocese of Ferns—a Diocese where not one word of vernacular Irish is spoken—indicate a line of action which, if universally adopted in Ireland, would act as a powerful antidote against the decay that is frittering away our native speech.

Now that our country has passed through the Red Sea of bitterness, and is beginning to exercise an energizing power among the nations of the earth, it is short-sighted policy to deprive her of her passport to antiquity and ancient fame. Though she has no colonies strictly so called, there are Irish men and women, and descendants of Irish men and women scattered throughout the civilized world, but especially in the vast realms of the new Continent, who are exercising a profound influence on the destiny of the human race. These millions of Irish blood take the cue from us at home in many matters; they depend on the inspiration they receive from the old country to individualize them, to mark them off from the nondescript masses of humanity in the large manufacturing centres of the world. If our people at home, by the loss of their language, and the consequent loss of their native music and immemorial traditions, make themselves indistinguishable from, say, the populations of Manchester or Liverpool, how can the Irish abroad be expected to preserve their national characteristics. With the break down of the barrier of language, a form of decaying, foreign civilization will take deeper and deeper root amongst us; the populations in our towns will become a seething mass

of vulgar and brutal nondescripts, the lower strata of whom, after a course of this new, spreading civilization, will not make good candidates even for the army. As Irish is dying out, this new civilization is growing fast; it is eating its way into the very bones of our people, and if allowed to go on unchecked, it will reduce us to a tribe of drivellers incapable of fulfilling the high destiny which seems marked out for our race. Study of the Irish language, enthusiasm for it, zeal in propagating it, exercises a most salutary influence on the character of our people, even where that study is up-hill work, and there is no living speech. Hence the Irish revival is for all Ireland, for every town and village and city in Ireland, and for the Irish beyond the sea; it is not merely, though it is mainly a revival of the language, it is a revival, too, of Irish music, Irish dancing, Irish games, Irish customs; it is a revival of the social gaiety which characterizes the Gael, but which our connection with England has long clouded and obscured.



V.—THE IRISH LANGUAGE REVIVAL MOVEMENT.

THE wonderful procession that passed through the streets of our chief city a few days ago, is calculated to fix public attention for some brief time on the vital importance of the revival of our language in the economy of our national life. To the great majority of those who composed that procession, the Irish language is not a vernacular speech. They may have picked up a few phrases of it in some class-room or from the newspapers; but to read it, to converse in it naturally, is beyond their power. And yet there must be some rational explanation of the enthusiastic ardour with which they identify themselves with the cause of that language, and of the energy with which they labour for its success. In no other country in Europe, or in the wide world to-day is the question of a vernacular language searching the hearts of the people, moving men of genius and talent to the exercise of unwonted energy, and inducing the masses to organise and put forth new strength and threaten with destruction every institution in the land that refuses to identify itself with the fortunes of an ancient and historic tongue. What is the significance of this extraordinary phenomenon? Just at a time when vernacular Irish has reached its lowest point, when the Irish-speaking areas have dwindled down to the point at which they count by single parishes, when the avenues of education are closed to that ancient speech, when only an infinitesimal fraction of the trade and commerce of the country is carried on in that language, when it seems even on the verge of death; just at this time, I say, the entire country is beginning to awaken to a sense of its importance, is beginning to set themselves to the work of restoring it to its due position in our national life. For the past 150 years or so, during which the national language has been steadily declining, the energies of the nation were employed mainly in political issues, in striving to wrench even a modicum of freedom from an alien Government, in striving to resist the evil effects of an iniquitous system of land tenure, in vindicating the sacred claims of religious liberty, in battling against the encroachments of artificial famine, in striving, in short, to obtain something like a firm footing for the masses of the people in their own

land. From time to time, systems of poor-law, systems of education, forms of land tenure were accepted, not because they were good, but because they were the best that could be obtained. The long struggle for political justice and religious freedom drained the resources of the nation, and it is only during a lull in the political arena, like the present, that the attention of the nation at large is fixed on the position and importance of her ancient speech.

Surely it is no mere love of grammatical points, no mere desire to stammer in a non-vernacular speech, it is not the mere attractiveness of this ancient speech, with its old-world orthography, with its old-world vowel sounds and vowel combinations, it is not these things alone, nor mainly, that has induced such a considerable portion of the masses of the people to try and master the difficulties of this speech, and to work with strange energy for its preservation and extension. No. During the political lull I have referred to, the people have been instinctively taking a survey of their present status and position, just as an army will reckon up the total of its losses and defeats during a cessation of hostilities, and, as a result of their observations, there is a suspicion gaining ground amongst them that the battle waged to vindicate the right of Irishmen to acquire a firm hold of the soil of Ireland, and the fight for religious liberty have been waged with ruinous cost and almost irreparable damage to the national life of the people. As the smoke of these conflicts is clearing off, the more observant amongst us behold a strange transformation: the people themselves so long militant, gradually losing their character and assuming the characteristics of the foreigner. Who can deny that within the past century or so, Irish life, Irish manners, Irish customs have been gradually giving place to English or foreign life and manners and customs? The time-honoured traditions of the people are forgotten or despised. What Irishmen for generations held dearest is brushed aside as vulgar and antiquated, and models of life of fashion and morals are drawn from across the Channel. But, greatest wound of all, the speech of the foreigner, has taken deep and ineradicable root in the land, and has driven out the ancient language from towns and cities and villages, and even from the hearthstones of the poor, has driven it forth to eke out a miserable existence amid the mountain fastnesses of the West.

And what a retinue of changes and innovations follow in the wake of a change of language. With a foreign language come foreign modes of thought, foreign ideals in art and literature, foreign customs, foreign manners, the spread of all that is debasing in foreign literature. To give the foreign language a chance of striking root, the native rival must be

plucked up by the roots, its literature must be discounted, the treasure of its wisdom and traditions regarded as curiosities. The new language must be pampered and fed at the expense of the old. With the new language comes the undue study of the literature and history of the country which claims it as a birthright; native heroes, sages and seers are despised or, at most, regarded as picturesque barbarians. The rising race is trained up in the notion, that whatever is refined, whatever is polite, whatever is artistic, whatever is philosophic is associated with the foreign country, and that their own ancestors have handed them down no wise maxims, no literature, no history worthy of preservation or study. The genuine study of native history which should light up the souls of our children, and kindle their hearts to enthusiasm, has to give place to a dull and frigid study of the doings of foreign princes and potentates. A foreign language is gradually sapping our national institutions and destroying the continuity of our national existence. It is in vain that we protest that we are pure Irishmen and not half-Englishmen; does not our very speech betray us, as it betrayed St. Peter on the eve of the crucifixion of his Master. Native history, native literature, native art must suffer, nay, fail hopelessly if an imported language, and an imported literature, bringing with them, as they must, foreign ideals in art and literature, are allowed to monopolise our educational systems and commercial and social life, crushing the native vernacular out of existence, and causing genuine native creations in art and literature to be derided and decried. No genuine native school of literature, or of art, can ever be created from foreign or Anglo-Irish models; you cannot breathe the soul of the Irish nation into a literature whose essence is the imitation of foreign epics or sonnets, you cannot quicken native intellect to delicate perceptions of art, so long as the vital principle of their artistic education is alien imitation; you cannot educate the people as a whole to become a healthy national entity, fit to discharge the functions of civilized nations without holding up before them, as in a mirror, their past struggles and their past triumphs.

It is obvious that the influence of a foreign language, without a native rival, installed in our homes and school-rooms, of a language alien to native genius in art and literature, affords a benign soil in which the debasing spirit of imitation lives and thrives. The spirit of imitation, when adopted as a principle in national life, is at all times pernicious and militates against the growth and development of native civilization, but that spirit is less an evil in some ages than in others. There was a time in the history of England when the English character, whatever may have been its defects, was

strenuous and robust, when English literature was vigorous and healthy; in such an age the spirit of imitation would have lost much of its evil. But in times like the present, when public life in England has entered on a phase of moral degradation, and when English literature is decadant and debasing, imitation can produce no good fruit, and must inevitably result in sterilizing native talent and thwarting the aspirations of native ambition. I am speaking of imitation considered as a first principle, as it is obvious that imitation when kept in due check, has uses and functions which are not to be despised.

To check this spirit of imitation, and to prevent its undue influence on the various ways in which the national mind seeks the outlet of self-expression, a native atmosphere must be formed and fostered, enveloping, so to speak, every field of human activity, and bracing up every nerve of the intellectual energy of the race. When an atmosphere of this kind has been generated, by the help of its light and shade, of its reflection and refraction, the native mind can safely study and imitate foreign models. By the help of such an atmosphere, foreign ingredients will be digested and assimilated, instead of undermining the constitution by creating a nausea of native nourishment. Such an atmosphere alone can afford the true medium through which the native mind may with safety look out on the world of art, of literature, of industry; such an atmosphere alone is congenial to native enterprise and native creation. This atmosphere must envelop the homestead, the school-room, the halls of the University; its all-pervading influence must be felt in every walk of life, in every field of energy, in every avenue of knowledge. Such an atmosphere, softened by the mellow light of native history and legend, would change the whole outlook of our public and national life. Political and social problems that **have long vexed the souls of statesmen** and given anxious nights to sterling patriots, would lose much of their difficulty and perplexity when viewed through the congenial medium of a truly Irish atmosphere. To create such an atmosphere, we must, of course, work on such materials as exist and are ready at hand; we cannot, by willing it, make the facts of the case other than what they are, but it is of paramount importance that every element calculated to create an Irish atmosphere, should be preserved and fostered and developed, and, as an obvious consequence, every effort should be made to preserve and develop the language that has been vernacular in Ireland for 3,000 years, and is still vernacular in Ireland—to preserve it as a living language breathing the very breath of native traditions, and redolent of the spirit of native literature and native melody.

It is the wildest of dreams to imagine that we are ameliorating the condition of the Irish race in the direction of national regeneration, when we import foreign and improved implements of husbandry, foreign and improved breeds of cattle and such like, while we, at the same time, are producing a state of things in the social, educational and commercial fields of activity in which the native language must droop and wither, and in no long time disappear from the land. It is in vain that you pretend to befriend native art, and literature, and industry, while you do your best to banish from the land that old-world language with its inexpressible sweetness, with the wealth of its matchless harmony, with the glowing ardour of its impassioned songs. From a literary, from an artistic point of view, as a stimulus to native enterprise in industry and commerce, the disappearance of that venerable language will leave a void which it is impossible to fill, and with it will disappear the chance of developing a distinctly native civilization for ever. But can the withered oak bloom again and put forth green leaves in the spring time? Can we behold lilies spring, and sudden verdure rise in the barren waste? Can the murmur of new falls of water be heard amid the thirsty wilds? Can the ancient language of Erin flourish again as a living speech in those districts in Ireland whence it has receded even as the tide ebbs, leaving behind a sightless waste of sand and mire? I do not choose to dwell on the hopeless aspects of this question, but I can confidently assert that, with proper organization, and by giving proper direction to the growing energy of the language movement, not only can the language be preserved in full vernacular vigour in those districts where it is at present the ordinary medium of communication between man and man, but that it can be restored to the full functions of a vernacular speech in those larger districts from which it is but just receding, in which it is still spoken by the adult population, or, at least, by the older generation. No doubt every stride in advance made by the language movement in any part of Ireland, strengthens the hold of vernacular Irish in the country, nevertheless, it is only by concentrating the main stream of energy of the movement on the strictly vernacular areas, and on those border areas to which I have referred, that we can hope to establish an Irish-speaking population of sufficient extent, of sufficient resource to withstand the inroads of an alien education conveyed in an alien speech.

To produce a perceptible effect on these districts, all the energy that the movement can command will have to be exerted, and continue to be exerted for years to come. But as surely as that energy is called into play in these vernacular and border districts, the cause of living Irish will advance;

the living speech will not only plant itself firmly in its present possessions, but take forcible possession of new territory with the contagious energy of a spreading fire. Almost all the circumstances are at this moment favourable to the growth and development of living Irish, provided the Gaelic League direct the torrent of its energy to these districts. The public bodies are capitulating and can all be captured; a considerable number of the clergy can, by assistance and encouragement, become active propagandists of the living speech; the school curriculum, though far from satisfactory, can, by judicious action be developed into a powerful lever in the same cause. Public opinion is ripe for a thorough awakening, it is gaining in volume and strength and requires only the impetus of the Gaelic League organisation to burst forth in its power and bear down all opposition. It is a crying shame that wherever Irish is spoken at all, even by the older generation, it should be excluded from the obligatory subjects in the school curriculum. In those border districts, to which I have referred, that still retain the priceless inheritance of the living speech, but where it is in imminent danger of perishing every class in the community, every institution in the community from the public boards to the family circle, from the public press to the school must by the steady pressure of a strong and active organization, be made to realize the gravity of the situation that has to be faced. It is only by the united application of the forces of the entire community that a return of the exhausting tide of our living language can be secured. Let those who accuse us of violence in connection with the language movement recall the outrageous tyranny by which Irish school children were made to lisp in an alien tongue. But violent methods are not necessary. If the forces that are already at work be strengthened and developed, their united effect under the direction of a vigilant organization will prove effective, and in no very long time the wonder of a reviving language will be revealed; the prodigy of a language regaining its old position by the fire-side and in the House of God, at fairs and markets and in the business haunts of the country.

A reviving language will thrill with new life the rising generation, it will fire their souls with the genuine spirit of their ancestors, it will kindle within them the love of art, the love of music and of song, for it is a language that while its roots go down deep into historic and prehistoric ages, is still plastic as the poets' dreams, is still instinct with glowing enthusiasm and soul-subduing pathos. It is no moribund language that we are awakening. I venture to say that there is not a European language of which I know anything, more sprightly and more plastic; it is, indeed, deficient in up-to-

date scientific terms, and the conventional phrases of Courts and Council-chambers, but in all that goes to build up a great literary language—strength, rythm, melody, precision of expression, fancy—it has few rivals. It requires only to be cultivated, with care and patience, to produce flower and fruit, and strike deep root and flourish in the land.

We are asked by well-meaning men to develop the resources of our country, to extend our tillage, to advance our manufactures; and the advice is sound and helpful, but they add in the same breath, that Irish should be confined to learned books and dusty manuscripts, and that it has no right to obtrude itself on the business or relaxation of the people. The living Irish speech then, according to these men, is the only institution we possess which must not be developed, but must be allowed to droop and die; and even its death must be hastened by a rigid exclusion from all the avenues of education and commerce. But we who labour for the genuine regeneration of our country, cannot be content with mere material improvements, we seek to restore to our country her true traditional spirit, her true historic lineaments; we feel that the living Irish speech is one of her most precious treasures, that without fostering and cultivation it must certainly perish, and that with it will pass away the Irish nation as it is known to history, as it is delineated in our early chronicles and romances. The genuine spirit of the historic Irish race lives and throbs in the matchless melody of our living speech. To foster the living speech is to foster that spirit without which our nation cannot preserve its historical identity, even though it should amass wealth, and though the industrial furnace should be heated with an un-failing fire throughout the land. We seek in a regenerated Ireland not a mongrel country built up after the image and likeness of England, nondescript in population, nondescript in pursuits, nondescript in public spirit. We want the future to reflect the past, in its essential spirit, but to improve on that past, by reading in the clear mirror of native history, the failings of that past, and by seeking to avoid them, and by reproducing the fidelity, the public spirit, the highmindness and the other virtues that reflect glory on our race—by reproducing these in our rising generation. As for material prosperity, it must inevitably follow in the wake of Ireland's regeneration thus worked out. Ireland mean-spirited, Ireland imitating alien manners and fashions is Ireland poor and despised; but Ireland self-reliant, Ireland confiding in her own energy, and cultivating her native characteristics, Ireland cherishing the language of her youth, and perpetuating its potent spell is Ireland prosperous and independent.

VI.—SOME PHASES OF THE LANGUAGE REVIVAL MOVEMENT.

ON being asked by the hard-working members of the O'Growney Branch of the Gaelic League to address a few words to you on the occasion of this night's entertainment, I felt it difficult to refuse, as I have long ago learned how justly the members of this branch appreciate the full significance of the language movement, and how strenuously they labour to attain the objects of that movement. We are in the position of a poor, weak country striving to hold its own against a powerful populous nation across the Channel. This city, the capital of our country, should be something more than a mere suburb of London. The people of Dublin and the people of Ireland should be something better than mere imitators of English life, of English fashions, of English manners, and English morals. It is impossible that a vast city like London, the centre of legislative and executive power, the headquarters of the machinery that governs a great empire, should not affect powerfully this city and this entire Island. Its influence on our trade, our commerce, our social and intellectual life is profound and far-reaching; it extends to the lowest classes in the community, it affects the very paupers in our Unions, and for the most part it is an influence that tends to destroy our trade, to cripple our commerce, to wipe out the great landmarks of public morals that purify and sweeten our social intercourse. London life, and the life in the great English cities, is in a corrupt and degenerate stage, and its contagion is spreading far and wide. Without, perhaps, our fully perceiving it, Dublin and other Irish cities and even many country districts are becoming tainted by the foul effluvia that exudes from that mighty but degenerate mass of human beings. Against this growing contagion, against the encroachment on every side of English influence, there is one powerful antidote: it is that the rising generation should be inoculated with the spirit of their ancestors, should drink Irish traditional lore at the fountain head, and should have their souls steeped in the health-giving waters of native literature and legend. The rising Irish race must be taught to take a

pride in the long story of their country's resistance to injustice and oppression, in the noble part played by their ancestors in civilizing and Christianizing the fierce tribes that dwelt by the Rhine and Garonne, shrouded in the mists of barbarism and sitting in the valley of the shadow of death. They must be taught to lisp the names of Irish heroes, saints and sages. They must be made to imbibe the spirit of the ancient civilization of Erin. It is only by catching up that spirit that we here in Dublin, or that Irishmen generally can ever be anything more than a nondescript body of merchants and farmers. Once we lose sight of the great landmarks of our history, once we fail to learn the lessons that it teaches, we lose the virility of our national life, and sink more and more to the level of nondescript units of the British Empire.

The study of native history and native literature and legend must flourish amongst us, if we wish to keep unbroken the thread of our national existence; it is the vivifying principle that gives point and force to all our other pursuits, to our commerce, our industries, to art, to music, to science. But the study of our history and literature and legends can never be what it should be unless the Irish language is amongst us not as a dead and learned tongue, but a living reality, a live vernacular speech cultivated as other living tongues, and yielding the fruit of a literature racy of the soil. The living speech is a living lesson in Irish history—a lesson, too, that is destined to impress itself on the civilized world and spread the past greatness and fame of Ireland to the ends of the earth. Though short the time since the tide of the Irish Revival has begun to flow, the living accents of that language have gone forth, laden with melody, like a refreshing breeze from the Atlantic:—

“ In air the trembling music floats,
And on the winds triumphant swell the notes,
So soft, so sweet, so loud and yet so clear,
Even listening angels lean from heaven to hear;
To farthest shores the ambrosial spirit flies,
Sweet to the world and grateful to the skies.”

But this movement for the preservation and extension of the living Irish speech—is it to be a sham or a reality? Its success is admittedly necessary if we wish to save our country from the degrading state of being a mere nondescript ward in the vast edifice of the British Empire. If I read our history aright we were born for much more than this. Our native language and literature, if duly cultivated are sufficient to mark us off as a distinct race, with a distinct history, and a distinct civilization—a civilization that impressed itself

on Europe, long before the foundations of the British Empire were laid. And if we are true to that civilization, if we are assiduous in cultivating our literature and language, when the British Empire goes to pieces, as all great empires have done, our country will emerge from its ruins no mere misshapen fragment of an opaque planet, but a fully-developed star destined to shine evermore in the firmament of the nations. I look forward to an evolution in the future history of this country; we have the deposit of our native language and literature entrusted to us by those who went before us, and we are bound to look forward to the countless generations of Irishmen that are to come after us, whom it would be rank injustice to defraud of so precious a national heritage.

Are we to have a sham language movement or a real one? What are our representative boards doing to emphasise the claim of the language to public recognition? What are our scholastic institutions doing to train the young in the traditions of their country. Recent legislation has put on our public boards men who are in close touch with the people, men who are supposed to echo their aspirations and their hopes. I cannot believe that the language movement will assume national proportions until I see our public boards taking off their coats to the work of its preservation and extension. The public boards have a great responsibility in this matter. They are the accredited voice of the people, they are the guardians of public honour and public faith, they are the exponents of national sentiment. They wield a tremendous power for good or evil. In a matter like the language movement, which can be made to enter into the daily lives of the people, they can do mighty work. They have only to lead, the people will follow. There are a thousand ways in which they can bring the language to the front. Some methods will suit some districts, some others. But it is in their power, without force or violence, to push the language to the front, and keep it at the front, in every corner of the island. Hitherto the public boards, with a few honourable exceptions, have done nothing for the language. It is high time that they should bestir themselves.

We see at this moment around us signs of the vast changes that are taking place in the national, the social and corporate life of our country. The old and wretched system of land tenure is passing away, the tiller of the soil is being assured of a permanency in his holding; our educational systems are gradually freeing themselves from their old traditions of ineptitude; local and national power is gradually coming within the clutch of the representatives of the people; old institutions are sinking with a crash, new institutions are springing into existence. It is our aim, and it is within the power of

the public boards to realise that aim, to plant the ancient language of Erin in its living state amid these institutions, as an institution twining itself indissolubly with them all, so that it may grow with their growth and strengthen with their strength."

If these new institutions are allowed to take root and grow up without the fostering protection of the national language, no power on earth can prevent their becoming strong and inerradicable English institutions planted on the soil of Ireland—no power on earth can prevent their becoming perennial sources of Anglicisation. It is in the power of the public boards to make the fountain of national sentiment and citadels of national power by advancing the national language to its due place in public life.



VII.—THE IRISH SPEAKING DISTRICTS.

WE have reached a crisis in the history of the Irish Language movement. The organization dealing with it is large and growing. Its machinery is becoming more complex. The cost of its up-keeping is becoming heavier year by year. There is no one but must rejoice at the spread of the movement throughout the entire country, at the efforts that are being made to have the Irish language taught in the schools of the land, at the greater interest taken in its study by adults and by the learned. But in this wide-spreading growth of the movement, and the consequent growth of expenses, there is a positive danger to the real objects of the movement. The primary object of the movement, I take it, is the preservation of Irish as a vernacular speech and the gradual extension of its vernacular use. The forces at work in diminishing the vernacular areas and in diluting the speech even within these areas, are so strong and so constant, that it will require a far more serious effort than has yet been made to arrest the decay that is frittering away our vernacular speech. The Gaelic League has, at considerable expense, put several organizers in the field. The experiment deserves a fair trial. But it is quite safe to say that, be the zeal and efficiency of the organizers what it may, no body of organisers as such can save the vernacular language from the death to which it seems hastening. The wide extension of the League has a tendency to place the mere student, the mere stammerer in Irish—on terms of equality with the native speaker—nay, to give him the preference. The student of Irish—the stammerer in Irish, if I may so call him without the slightest depreciation—should get every encouragement in our power, but multiply him a million-fold, and that million of stammering students will be powerless to save from extinction the genuine accents, the native idiom of our vernacular speech. It is the genuine native speaker alone that can spread the genuine language. It is the native speaker alone that can hand on the living torch to future generations. It is in the native speaker as a single individual and in groups and combinations that the only hope of the language rests. The study of the language by others is of importance, inasmuch as it is inspired by

native sources and moulded and modelled on the living Irish speech. Were there a newspaper to-morrow exclusively in Irish in every great city in Ireland, conducted and written by students of Irish who have no vernacular grip of the language, it would leave the problem of preserving the vernacular speech just where it is. Hence the true progress of the movement is measured by the importance attached to the native speaker, by the progress that is made in founding in the vernacular districts institutions, living facts, which will necessitate the constant use of the living speech.

Of these institutions, these living facts, the most important is the school, taken to include religious instruction in all its forms. In estimating the chance our vernacular speech has of maintaining its ground, it is important to remember that there is not at present a single school in Ireland which may be truly called Irish; there is not a single school in which Irish is used as the ordinary medium of conveying instruction, in which it is recognized as the vernacular of the people.

If this state of things continue it requires no gift of prophecy to pronounce the doom of the language. A vernacular speech cannot be called into existence at will. It cannot be produced suddenly as you manufacture bricks. It must be planted and watered. It is precarious and delicate in its habits. At the present time vernacular Irish will droop and die unless it be cultivated as a literary language and employed for all the uses of cultured, civilized life. The immediate work before the Gaelic League is to secure that there shall be genuine Irish schools in the vernacular districts. From such schools and from them alone can there spring a generation able to speak and write the language in its purity. In establishing a genuine Irish school you are sowing the seed of the living speech. It is an institution which, by its permanency and stability, by its attractive force, will cause to cling to it a pure, living, progressing language, even as the ivy grows from year to year as it fastens on to the elm tree in ever increasing coils. More than this. The problem of preserving our vernacular Irish can be completely solved only by pulling the vernacular districts together socially and by developing their resources and their civilization, such as it is, in their own way. You must not daub them with external polish; you must work from within. You must found their education, their civilization, their general amelioration on the Irish language. If you fail to do that, the language is lost.

You must develop their material resources; you must try to make it worth their while to live in their own country and to carry on life's business in their own tongue. Speeches and pamphlets against emigration are little worth. A living institution in the shape of some profitable industry will act on

the material aspect of the question as the school will act on the language. It will cause to cling round it a permanent body of Irish-speaking people for whom their own country and their own homes will begin to be irresistibly attractive. The Gaelic League can do but little directly in this respect, but what it can do should be done. But it can move more powerful forces and direct their operation to the work of improving the material and social condition especially of the Irish-speaking population, and thereby save from a threatened destruction the language which we all so love.



VIII.—IRISH POETRY OF THE LAST THREE CENTURIES CONSIDERED AS NATIONAL SELF EXPRESSION.

THERE is something characteristic in a nation's poetry that is not to be found in any of its other institutions. In its poetry is revealed a nation's soul, its fervour, its zeal, its yearning for glory, its brightness of spirit, its tenderness of heart. There is revealed, too, the periods of its despondency, its unutterable sorrow, its cry of anguish in the face of dire calamities. For its poetry is the music of a nation's heart. Its very cadences, its metrical system, are fraught with meaning. The poetical history of a nation is a record of its inmost longings, of its hopes and its fears, its joys and sorrows.

A distinction must be drawn between popular poetry and learned poetry—between the poetry that the common people catch up and introduce into their daily lives, and the poetry that is more learned and elaborate. Most of the great epics of the world are of the latter class. Milton's "Paradise Lost" cannot be enjoyed by the average English reader. He may feel a national pride in Milton, but he takes his excellence on trust. We may well believe that Virgil's "Æneid" was not much relished by the ordinary Roman, though he gloried in the name of Virgil. There have been nations which reached a high level of cultivation without the general diffusion of letters, and whose national literature, therefore, though deep and elaborate, enters into the daily life of the many. Take the case of Greece. The plays of Euripides, of Sophocles, of Æschylus, are specimens of elaborate literature, but they were publicly acted, and though every allusion, every difficult strophe of the chorus was not understood generally, the main trend of thought was caught up by the listeners and sank deep into the national mind. Something similar can be said of the plays of Shakespeare, though in a less degree, for in Greece, the public acting of such plays as the "Troades" was a national institution.

Popular poetry can be more easily retained in the memory; it is simpler; it is more instinct with passion; it more

naturally melts into music; it is more suited to singing. Its metrical structure, however elaborate, is adapted with a view to its doing duty for song. The thought it embodies requires no elaborate syllogistic reasoning to grasp; it appeals rather to the emotions than to reason; deals rather with the first principles of humanity, so to speak, religion, heroism, courage, faith, love, liberty, than with more intricate deductions such as kingcraft, statesmanship.

There is a middle class of poetry—imaginative poetry—which partakes of the nature of both. Poetry, in which the legend is not worked out with the rigour of an epic, but in which the popular fancy is fed with the achievements of legendary heroes—their doings in love and war, and in the chase.

The quality of its poetry is peculiar to a nation and an age. Thus pastoral poetry, in its strict sense, was a native only of Greece. Theocritus brought it to perfection. The Romans sought in vain to build up a pastoral poetry after the Greek model. The greatest of Roman poets tried to compete with Theocritus. Vigil wanted neither genius, insight, nor plasticity of imagination, but he failed, and failed only because the scenes he endeavours to describe had no longer a reality. The Roman pastoral population were very different from the Greek. Arcadia, with its golden creed, had disappeared, and Daphnis, Galatea, Phyllis, are no better than imported shadows in the pages of Vigil. The attempts of English poets, such as Pope and Philips, to revive the Greek pastoral were ludicrous in the extreme, as English rural life was still further removed from the Greek than was the Roman. Poetry, then, to be genuine, must be true to nature, external and human.

In the Irish poetry of the last 300 years or so, the popular element prevailed. During that time there has not been much written in the elaborate and comprehensive style; even the more artificial metres that caught the eye rather than pleased the ear were abandoned for a system, elaborate, too, no doubt, but still mainly framed for the ear and thus more suited to fasten on the memory and do the duties of melody and song. These metrical systems were cultivated with the greatest assiduity and zeal, but not after a formal fashion. The leading poets took to them as a matter of course, or by a kind of instinct. The manuscript remains before 1600 show little of this sort of metre, yet it blazes forth suddenly as clear, as perfect, as distinct as if it had been handed down in direct succession for ages. The outburst, indeed, seems spontaneous, but unquestionably there must have been an under-current of poetry and song couched in what thereafter became the popular metrical systems. Although the manuscripts are

filled with *dán díreach* poems for centuries, I suspect that these metres did not flourish in the everyday songs of the people. The songs people sang at the fireside, or in the open fields, were less rigidly constructed than the *dán díreach*; they did more for the ear; they were simpler in language, less contorted in syntax, less the slaves of groups of consonants. But the set compositions of hereditary bards, the stringing together of genealogies, the abstruse musings of the book-learned poet, were carefully indited in what may be called with almost verbal accuracy the *orthodox* metre, and careful copies were made and preserved on vellum and on paper; while the lighter songs that beguiled the lonely hours, or the chants of mournful melancholy and deep pathos, were not so carefully penned, or so accurately recorded. But a time came when this state of things was to undergo a change. The country passed through a time of strain during the Elizabethan period which affected profoundly her national ideals. The possibility of independence was gone; north and south had to submit to a cruel and exasperating yoke. Peace of a certain dull, hopeless kind was restored; the passion of Irish life was driven below the surface. The external administration of the country—the courts, the legislature—all assumed an English aspect. Native schools of learning were closed, and the nation fell into a settled gloom.

The language welled forth everywhere in all its vigour, but a leisurely study of poetical models, a systematic training in poetry, except in a few isolated districts, was a luxury not to be thought of. Men of genius were not wanting to sing their country's sorrows, but in tuning the lyre to such a doleful pitch they naturally shrank from the conventionalities of an artificial and over-wrought metrical system, and, as by instinct, turned themselves to stressed metres with vowel assonance. It is remarkable that the earliest poems of which we have record in these metres date somewhere about the opening years of the seventeenth century, when the country was settling down to a tranquil slavery. Such is Keating's "*Óm' rceál ar áirí-maig fáil ní éiríaim oróce,*" which sounds a note of sorrow re-echoed for two centuries of Gaelic song. The weird music of these rhythms, once set afloat and directed by men of genius, had a strange fascination for the Irish mind. It haunted that mind for ages, and that mind is still within the influence of its potent spell. These metres would have been impossible—at least so sudden and spontaneous an outflow of them would have been impossible—if the language had not been prepared for them by arduous metrical cultivation.

A language capable of such metres is a great heritage; it contains stored within it the passions of ages. As water, in its career down a mountain slope, smoothes the rugged

granite rock and works out for itself a fair bed amidst heather and stone, so a nation's passions, set to the music of poetry, worked a melodious path through the rough aspirates and jarring sounds of the language. It is in the development of this vein of music in the heart of the language—embedded in it like some precious ore—that our modern syllabic poetry consists.

Nor were historical tragedies waiting to give it the sombre depth of melancholy. The years between 1640-1660, with their carnage and devastation, their ruthless plantation, the exportation of Irish slaves, and a quarter of a century later the dread horrors of the Williamite wars, and the long night of religious persecution that followed filled the national cup of bitterness to the brim, and made a deep and lasting impression on the national mind. The historical records of that period are gruesome and depressing, but they deal chiefly with political events; the real life of the nation is reproduced, and reproduced only in the poetry composed during these years of sorrow and suffering, and especially the poetry written in stressed metres. The syllabic metres, it is true, died hard, and some splendid poems were written in these metres up to the close of the seventeenth century. But from that period on they occur but rarely, and seldom are they used to express pathos or emotion. They are, as a rule, employed when thoughts are to be delicately shaded off, when refined compliments are to be paid, when keen, sustained reasoning takes the place of flashes of imagination. But the literary instinct of poet and singer led them to adopt the stressed metres in giving vent to deep national grief, or in the lighter and more careless lays of love and revelry.

The laments for the dead had, so to speak, grooved out a metrical channel for themselves, which goes farther back than the other stressed metres, as far as the MSS. can guide us. But these elegies acquired their full resonance only some years after the Revolution.

Elegiac Poetry in Irish is a *literature* in itself; it has been on the whole the most popular kind of poetry. No doubt, it is very monotonous when wielded by the ordinary poet; he spins melodious verses in large numbers, but presents you with no striking thought, no vivid picture. He bewails one man like another; he tells you little or nothing about the deceased that could not be predicated of any other good individual. One gets tired of hearing all his virtues introduced in solemn procession, ever in the same monotonous succession. But in the hands of a few great writers the elegy became a powerful tocsin, which produced mighty strains. A world of sorrow is revealed in these high-class elegies. It is as if the entire country wept the loss of some great man. The rivers and

streams, the hills and woods, hold dismal concert above his bier. In a certain sense the sorrow expressed in some of these grand elegies is a national sorrow. For had not the gravestone covered one of the great family of Milesius, a true descendant of the great kings and chieftains of the past? Did not death make a fresh inroad into the sparse ranks of the true Gaels and expose them more helplessly still to their cruel enemies?

The most copious poet of the seventeenth century is O'Bruadar. The name is Danish or Norwegian, with an Irish O. He has written much in both classes of metre, and he excelled in both. It is difficult at the present day to separate O'Bruadar's work accurately from that of O'Donoghue and other writers. His casquet comprises elegies, laments, satires, encomiums, etc. But his long wails for the fate that overtook his downtrodden country, and his contemptuous scorn for her enemies, and the ridicule he pours on them are his strongest features. Indeed, his wail is too long-spun, too feminine, too morbid. He seems never done. He lived through the civil wars and Cromwellian settlement periods. He was an old man when the Williamite wars ended in the religious and civil enslavement of the nation. He witnessed these two great national calamities, and he wept over both. But O'Bruadar never passes the wailing stage. He saw the Cromwellian settlers and they live in his verse. He saw how they elbowed the Gaelic nobles to Clare and Connaught, but hope was not yet dead, nor were these nobles yet entirely superseded and their families broken up. It was reserved for another poet to behold their fall and dispersion, and to record them in imperishable verse.

O'Rahilly must have been young when the fatal defeat of the Boyne laid Ireland prostrate under the heel of cruel bigots. The nobles were dispersed, this time hopelessly; many of them fell in the wars, others went into exile; their families were broken up, their lands bestowed on the foreign settlers. With the nobles went the institutions of which they were the centre and sustaining force. The bardic profession fell into abeyance. There were no longer hereditary *ollamhs*. The scattered remnant of the broken band of bards, once so powerful, were reduced to poverty. The new nobles heeded not their strains of rapture for Erin's past glories, or their cries of anguish as the night of desolation fell thick and murky on the land. These new nobles sneered at them and turned them out of doors. They were left to their own resources, bitterly to wail alone. Here and there a make-shift education could be snatched up; but there was no printing in Irish, there was no external stimulus calculated to call forth elaborate effort in verse. Whatever verse was written was composed not to

please a community of sated readers who keenly criticised allegory and transition, but was the haphazard result of a brooding inspiration. The result was that we have few poems "of linked sweetness long drawn out," embodying the leisurely speculations of easy-circumstanced philosophers, but many jets of pathetic lament for the vanished glories of the past.

No Irish poet ever appreciated more keenly the past glories of Erin than O'Rahilly. When he wrote, a night of impenetrable darkness had settled on the land. Men neither looked forward with courage and hope, nor even dared to look back and brighten their lives with gleams of a glorious past. But the poet stood alone: as a seer he kept his eye on the past: while he sang the present ruin of his land he never ceased to rehearse her imperishable glories. It is to be observed that so thick was the gloom of slavery in his day that he seldom speaks of hope. His lyrics and elegies are one long funeral dirge, with no thought of a glorious morrow. But such a dirge—so sweet, so tender, so hauntingly sad—was never before chanted over a doomed land. His lyric is the wild banshee cry as the death of a favourite chief is approaching; it is the tender plaint of a *bean chainte* over the bier of a dear friend; it is the plaintive shriek of a mother as the grave-stone presses down on all that is mortal of her children; it is the piercing wail of the widow mourning her murdered spouse. O'Rahilly's cry of anguish was kept up for some thirty years, during which time hope seemed for ever fled from the shores of Erin.

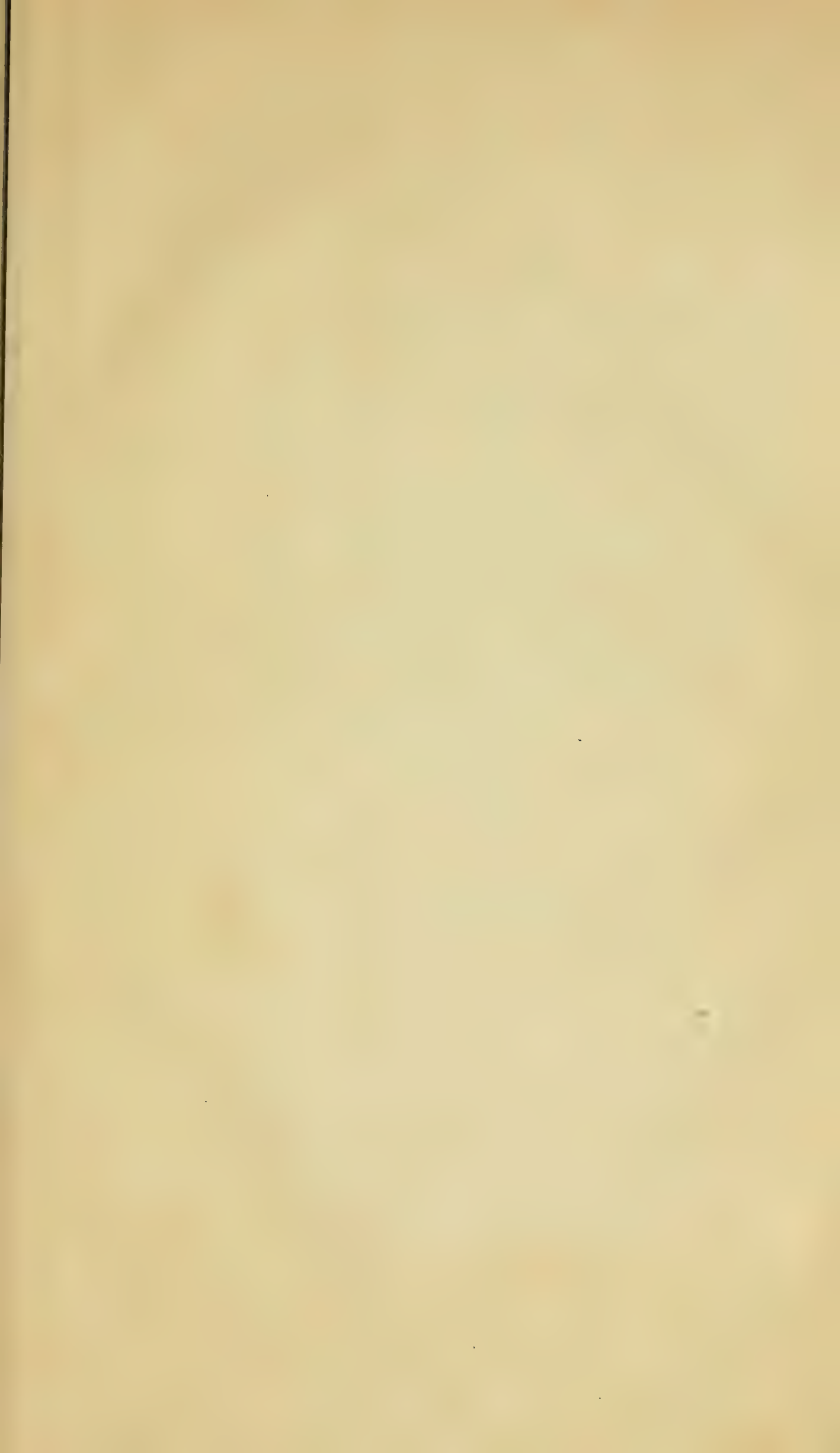
MacDonnell took up the wailing cry, and his tender plaint soothed the troubled spirit of his motherland in her hour of direst need. He burns with fierce wrath against her oppressors. He points his barbed shafts of satire against the mighty of the land with deadly force. But, as MacDonnell sings, the clouds are showing signs of breaking. Often, indeed, what seemed a rift in the dense mass of cloud that overhung the western sky was nothing but the prelude to a furious storm that involved earth and heaven in its wrack; but the poet, so often deceived, hoped on. He felt, as it were, his country's pulse as she lay bleeding and prostrate on her bed of death, and though sometimes what seemed returning animation was but the passing paroxysm of fever—the poet-physician had the true instinct of unswerving confidence.

When MacDonnell died—1754—the nation had settled into the deep lethargy of slavery and degradation, but her heart was sound. Soon after MacDonnell's death the voice of Eoghan Ruadh O'Sullivan was heard in the land. That voice, too, was not without its plaintive notes, but it spoke of courage and hope with no uncertain sound. Eoghan Ruadh found the people inured to slavery; their shackles were rusting round

their limbs, and were sure to fall off in the course of time ; but it was necessary that their spirit should be kept up while their shackles were falling off.

In the poems of Eoghan Ruadh, a vague, indefinite, but real current of hope and promise is felt. Nominally it is Louis and the French, or the Stewart and the Spanish, that are to accomplish the liberation of Erin, but what is certain is that that liberation is coming ; it may be slow, it may be accomplished with blood and tears, but let no one dare say that Erin will be a land of slaves for ever. With the incoming of freedom the language ebbed, the glowing melody of the poet was hushed throughout the land, and nought but a faint echo remained on the distant coasts or amid the glens and mountains of Munster of what was once the soul-inspiring concert of a nation's poetry. With returning freedom, English influences grew and strengthened and interwove themselves with every fibre of the nation's body, and struggled hard to steal away the soul from within it. But in these latter years a fresh effort is made to set our people free from the debasing bondage of degenerate foreign civilization, from the vile effluvia of a Cockney literature, and our greatest weapon of defence against this aggressive force lies in the true spirit of our motherland. But our native poetry is the true nurse of this spirit, and hence we should hail with joy the revival of an interest in our own Irish poets, whose songs and poems contain within themselves the pent up passions, the hopes, the longings, the wealth of devotion and tenderness of centuries of our national life. It is in these alone we can read the true inward spirit, the faith, the constancy, the piety of our ancestors. An old manuscript copy of the works of one of our native poets, begrimed with dust and worn and discoloured with age, is no less a true landmark of the history, of the true national spirit of our people than a ruined church with broken windows and shattered arches, with ivy crowning the sanctuary and nettles clustering in the aisles, is a landmark of the piety for which our fathers were famed in Western Europe. The study of the Irish language is the only key that can unlock to us the true spirit of our poetic literature, and thus put us once again in touch with the main currents of our national life.







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